

## THE INVOCATION

The Invocation E-zine is a quarterly published E-zine produced by Carpe Noctem and its members

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### Greetings from the Perverted One

#### Editorial

A lewd and luscious welcome to Issue 4 of the Invocation!

Haven't the last three months just flown past? Well, they seemed to have done for me at any rate, with Christmas (complete with two squabbling daughters, bless them!) it only seems like last week that Issue 3 was released. So with the New Year behind us it certainly seems to have put a spring in peoples' steps and this is especially prevalent on Carpe Noctem. It has been great to see a surge of new members, new painting logs, and with the Golden Bat Painting Competition some superb examples of painting. Likewise, everyone's creative juices seem have been flowing with two new User Projects started, wonderful stories, and some very perverted poetry, one of which was an ode to myself!

On the subject of new starts, the forum has finally moved hosts to a new and superb provider, Forum Forge. They provide one thing that is very important and that is quality, something that personally I feel is very important in, well, pretty much everything. Quality is substance, something which is well built, well-presented, and something that has had time and thought spent on it. Too much nowadays do we see things that are rushed, things that just won't hold up to inspection. Many years ago craftsmen spent so long perfecting their art to produce wondrous items, and that kind of dedication seems to be missing today...

No doubt you are all sat there, wondering where this rant is going. Firstly it is to urge you all to maybe spend a little more time on those things that are important. One lesson I hold dear is "Is something is worth doing, it is worth doing well". It may be hard at times, but that's when you ask for help, and that's where the forums step in. We are here to help you nail that painting technique, get that army list right, figure out that plot twist in your story.

The other side of it is to perhaps explain one unique thing about the Invocation. In this issue you will find well over a hundred pages of articles, but would they be any better with less information? I doubt it - every picture, every word adds that little bit more, and I know many of our regular readers would be upset if I only gave them a few pages of the Children of Maat.

In short, we have tried hard to produce a magazine that is a product of high quality, and this is something I hope that comes across as you read. As usual enjoy the issue and please remember to contact us with ideas or feedback.

Disciple of Nagash

### Grave News

#### **New Host**

Well as most of our members are aware, I recently transferred CN to a new host. This was mainly because our old host (FatCow, also known as TuCow) was an extremely poor host, with servers that always caused slowdowns, timing etc. So a warning for any other website owners out there!

The transfer was a bit turbulent due to FatCow making it difficult to leave, however it was finally complete, and I know that many people as well as myself have noticed the difference. With our new host, Forum Forge, we have not experienced any slowdown or problems thus far, and I am pleased to say they have delivered the excellent service they promised — so a high recommendation from me!

However as we are still settling in, I would remind all members to report any issues in the bug thread if any are noticed.

#### **True Blood Status**

Following an excellent suggestion by Master Vampire, it was decided to create a new user group, known as the True Bloods. This is an "elite" status, designed to recognize those who put in exemplary efforts in Carpe Noctem, and is granted to those who reach 1000 or more posts (this may change in the future depending on the forum growth).

As part of this group, True Bloods have access to the True Blood forum, which is now essentially the Staff Forum, where they can see (with a few exceptions such as warning logs etc) and contribute to the inner workings at CN, and also have access to the Invocation forum where they can preview the workings for the next issue.

There are also other benefits such as signature size etc, that are all part of being one of the True Bloods, so it is definitely something for our members to work towards.

#### **Warhammer Fantasy Online**

Something that is becoming a big success on other sites (notably Asrai.org and the Ogre Stronghold) is Warhammer Fantasy Online aka WFO. This picture based version, whilst very basic, does offer a viable and fun way to have Warhammer games on the forums, and is rapidly becoming in high demand.

After being screamed and pestered enough by CN's members I am happy to announce that we will be introducing it towards the back end of March 2010 / start of April 2010. I would firstly like to say a huge thanks to Beithir Seun at Asrai.org. This wonderful chap not only said it was fine to use their system, but also allowed me to download all the relevant files, saving me a lot of time and effort.

The only delay now is that I am currently having a modification made for CN that will allows users to roll dice on posts, which will not be able to be edited – so no cheating! There will also hopefully be a function for the scatter-dice as well, something to keep an eye open for over the next couple of weeks.

#### **Carpe Noctem Forum Awards Winter 2009**

After holding the Carpe Noctem forum awards, I take great delight in announcing the winners:

Best Overall Contributor: Disciple of Nagash

Best Tactical Advice: MasterSpark
Best Painting Log: SethDrallitoc

Best Painting and Modelling Advice: Josef

Best Fiction Get of W'soran

Best Role-Player Gree

Congratulations to all (apart from myself of course!), and from myself a huge thank you for the time and effort you have put in over the past year.

### The Vampire Council

#### **User Projects**

As mentioned in the December issue of the Invocation, the TVC is started its slow road towards the end, and with it the end of one of the best role plays I have ever been involved in. I recently checked and we now have over 5500 in-story posts, and I think that mark will easily go over the 7000 mark by the end.

One of the most obvious questions though is, how did we manage to keep it going for so long? When asked that, I honestly have to take a step back and think because it astounds me how the posting has always carried on when ninety percent of other role-plays fizzle out in one week.

So for all those who are thinking of starting a role-play as successful as the TVC, here are some important pieces of advice from the GM:

Create a setting where the majority of your characters are more or less equal, with only the founders or the GM being noticeably more powerful. This allows players to have their characters express their thoughts and opinions, meaning they speak more etc. Limiting this too much means players are forced to just agree to everything and get bored.

Be careful of power levels. It is expected some characters will be more potent that others, but pretty much all characters should have a weakness. For example most potent casters should be weak in combat etc. Of course then as the role play goes along they can increase in power, gain abilities etc.

This leads me nicely into what I would say is the most important aspect of the TVC, let everyone develop a story for their character. By this I mean the overall plot that is thought up (and you really should have one), should be adaptable and can be changed to incorporate new players and their ideas. This then means that players can start thinking up long term development for their characters. For example, I thought up one plot with another character which spanned over 18 months, having my own character subtly manipulated, captured, turned to evil and finally being killed by the one he loved. It didn't change the outcome of the main plot, but added to it with an interesting side plot. It also meant I was more motivated to keep posting. You can check the December Issue of the Invocation for more thoughts on this particular aspect.

Finally, but still importantly, this piece of advice is for anyone who controls a chapter

(on that note GM's should give all players the option to have a chapter dedicated to their characters plot where necessary). Plan a rough outline for the chapter, and tell those posting in it. You don't have to tell them about surprises, but if for example you say something like the following:

The battle starts with the Legions of Nagash attacking the Council. The Council will be outmatched by numbers and power, so they will be losing and fighting defensively. There will be XXX enemy units present, as well as many powerful Liches. The outline will be updated as the battle progresses.

I know it looks simple, but that small passage means players know how to act, know not to have their troops destroy the enemy etc. Plus it means if I have a plot twist for part way in, I can do that, and then advise the players of the remaining outline for the chapter.

Anyway, I hoped that has helped those who would like to emulate the TVC's success, and also encourages more players to join us. As I said last time, there is a sequel in the planning, visit the TVC forum to find out more:

The Vampire Council Forum

### The Legion of Nagash

**User Projects** 

Firstly I must apologise. In the last issue I did say we would have the Beta testing rules for the Legion of Nagash in this issue, but unfortunately it has just not been possible.

As with all rules development on CN, we like to be as thorough as we can to try and ensure that the rules are fair and balanced. So whilst most of the rules were finished we have been putting them through a review, which involved many discussions (and I have to give a nod to *Danceman* to playing devil's advocate and making sure we don't go too mad!), and some alterations. We also needed to finish our monster mounts (of which you can see the rules for the Dragon Shade below).

Finally, unlike the Bloodline Armies, the Legion is an army in its own right, and so deserves to be put together properly. So time will need to be put in the correct format, however rest assured that come our July issue, the Beta rules for the Legion of Nagash will be waiting!

If you would like to help with the Legion you can do so at the following link:

The Legion of Nagash Forum

#### Dragon Shade - 300pts

Not content with summon the bodies of the ancient dragons, Nagash sought supremacy over their noble spirits as well. In time the most devious of his magics managed to corrupt their souls, chaining them to his command forever.

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	LD
6	6	0	5	5	5	5	6	8

#### **Special Rules**

Undead Fly Terror Ethereal Large Target

#### **Cradle of Shadows**

Whilst its ethereal form does not allow any to ride this dangerous creature, its magical nature allows it to takes it master inside itself, delivering them safely to wherever they are commanded

This rule overrides the normal ethereal rule and allows corporeal characters to use the Dragon Shades as mount if the option is available to them.

#### **Essence of Decay**

The merest touch from this dragon leeches vitality from its victims. Those who are not slain outright by its claws find themselves ageing rapidly unto decay as the years rush forth to claim them and even their equipment.

At the end of every combat phase every model in Base to Base contact with the Dragon Shade must take a toughness test. If failed the model suffers a wound, no armour saves allowed.

#### Will of the Master

Dragons are noble creatures, and though dominated by another's will, an inkling of their former personality shines through.

If the rider is killed, then the dragon counts as being slain outright, no saves are possible against this. The model is removed from the tabletop immediately.

### **Bloodlines** Armies

**User Projects** 

So, since the release of the Bloodlines Beta rules there have been mixed responses. Firstly and most importantly, for those who did do some play testing there has been pretty much universal positive feedback. There has been nothing too overpowered with the one exception of the Quicksilver power (Minor power for all Bloodlines, +1A for 20pts), but other than that everyone has reported back saying the rules work, they feel right for the bloodline, and most importantly both players enjoyed themselves in the process.

There have, of course, been some notable things which play testing has picked up such as missing options, as well as certain combinations not working too well together. However perhaps the most important thing missed (which had me doing a Homer Simpson style "D'oh!") was that we forgot to put the Blood Dragons must issue and accept a challenge! Still that is the point of all the testing, as we are trying to create rules that can actually be used well together with the existing GW material.

Anyway, instead of me saying it all, here are some comments from our play testers:

#### Bauglir

#### Fallen Angel

"Blood Dragons are really entertaining to play and it really gives character to the army. It's too bad actually that I didn't have time to try any other bloodline family to see if they give the army the same character as this bloodline does! A work well done and my hat off to the people who have developed this and extra hat off to DoN who made all this possible! Thank you!!"

#### Fallen Angel's Opponent

"This was like a thousand times more fun that facing the normal vampires. The problem with them [standard VC Army List] is that they have no limits! They can have everything in the same army without any restrictions. With these new blood lines, the Vampire Counts get a lot of character. I would like to try and face other families as well to see if they are as balanced as this list is!"

Hearing these kind of responses certainly makes it all worthwhile, however we do need more feedback to be able to finalize the lists. To that end as stated in the Grave News, CN has now set a forum for Warhammer Fantasy Online. The same systems as Asrai (a huge thanks to Beithur Seun again!), as this way members who can't playtest in real life will find some willing victi- ah, opponents over the internet!

If you would like to help us playtest, or even if you just want to have some fun games with the character bloodlines, then feel free to visit the following link where you can download the rules:

**Bloodline Armies Forum** 

### The Gunhearts

#### **User Projects**

This issue I am very pleased to introduce two new projects, the first of which is the Gunhearts roleplay. Carpe Noctem, whilst still being a forum for the Vampire Counts, has recently embraced other areas of Warhammer, including 40K with its own section entitled "Dead Space". The interest in this area then gave birth to the 40K roleplay that is the Gunhearts.

It did, however, have a difficult start.

Originally it was based around a Cadian platoon, nicknamed "the Gunhearts". With various soldiers from the stereotypical ball-busting Sergeant (played by myself which I loved!), to hotshot snipers and even some Ogryns, it looked like the ideal mix. However we soon found out that was not the case.

The problem with the Imperial Guard is that they follow orders. An officer says go and get killed, and by the Emperor that's what they are going to do! But this then means that there is less opportunity for discussion and debate amongst characters, something which roleplayers on CN have got used to with being in the already well-established TVC roleplay.

They want to have their character develop and grow, to be able to show initiative, all which have trouble working in the IG, and so had trouble with in the Gunhearts. Posting dropped off and it seemed like the project was about to die..........

That was until the person who had been running the Gunhearts decided to revamp it. Gree is one of our long term members, having being in the TVC for years and was voted best roleplayer for 2009 (an impressive achievement considering how many roleplayers we have). The Gunhearts was originally his idea and with his impressive knowledge of 40K fluff, as well as suggestions by all of us involved in the roleplay, a new concept was born.

Deathwatch! The dreaded arm of the Inquisition charged with hunting down xenos (aliens) and destroying or taking their technology. Now this was a roleplay on an entirely different level as players could be Space Marines, an Inquisitor, or one of the Inquisitor's entourage. This made for much more unique and fun characters, especially when the first chapter sent us onto a space hulk in which we promptly lost contact with command, thus left in a situation where the mission must be achieved but there was no

clear leader. Players were then able to start expressing their thoughts and opinions through their characters. So far is has proved to be quite successful, with the first chapter so far being posted in regularly. If you want to be part of this new roleplay, then please click on the following link:

The Gunhearts Forum

As with all CN roleplays, recruitment is always open. Don't worry if you missed out on the start, there are many more chapters to come!

### Vampire Counts – 40,000

#### **User Projects**

Yes that's right. That isn't a typo. The last and most recent user project to have started on CN is to recreate Vampire Counts in Warhammer 40,000.

Now, this user project has perhaps received some of the most mixed response, with some people all for it, while others think it ridiculous or a waste of time. Whilst there are some armies that some people say are the equivalent of Undead in 40K (typically Necrons), most people will agree that there isn't an army that as the "feel" of Vampire Counts. Thus this project was born!

The main concept was not to do a straight copy, but more a translation into 40K. So whilst there would be vampire type characters, there wouldn't actually be vampires as we know them. The same apply to the rest of the army, we wanted some things that were linked to our characters, but not necessarily by magic. In the end we actually found something that worked very well and the credit goes to *Morbraelle*, a relatively new member to CN.

The concept was a group of renegade techpriests that invented nanobots, tiny machines that, when introduced to the body, enhanced it in so many ways, producing our vampire like creatures. However, the nanobots came with side effects. In addition to that, there was also talk of the little covered Cythor Fiends in the aptly name Ghoul Stars. Batlike creatures that already exist in 40K gave us an excellent footing, and so an unholy amalgamation of the two ideas was conceived.

The following is a very brief timeline of the background we have designed for our vamps in 40K. Please bear in mind this is still very rough and needs working on, but it should give you an idea. Finally, as this project is just starting there are plenty of ways you to help out, either via background or rules, so if you want to join in then visit the following link:

Vampire Counts 40,000 Forum

#### **Timeline**

Disappearance of the fledging Primarchs. In an attempt to further enhance his growing forces the Emperor requested the aid of the Adeptus Mechanicus, to research and create more potent warriors and weaponry.

A faction of the Adeptus Mechanius begins research into augmenting human physiology with microscopic robots, termed "nanobots".

Seventeen years later.

Finally a breakthrough is reached and working nanobots are finally manufactured. In the months after, leaps in advancement are made now that they have a working template. Experimentation begins on live subjects.

#### Two years later.

The nanobots have proven to be difficult to merge with the human body, causing a high fatality rate amongst the test subjects. Aware that this could cause the project to be shut down, the faction starts hiding their results and experiments.

Another 6 months have passed.

Another breakthrough is made, resulting in nanobots that have merged successfully with a host. Unfortunately, the host dies shortly afterwards due to an unrelated incident, leaving the faction with no more subjects. The many years have depleted the few they had at their disposal and the secrecy surrounding the project means they cannot request any more. Desperate, the Tech-Priests start experimenting on themselves.

#### A month later

The testing has produced results that they could never have expected. After a short incubation period, the nanobots merge completely with their hosts, augmenting them entirely - musculature strands were strengthened and adrenal gland productivity enhanced to produce immense strength, speed and reflexes.

Neural pathways were also reinforced and repaired wherever necessary, resulting in increased intelligence and, in some cases, the ability to use psychic powers.

Senses were also augmented with clearer vision, excellent sense of smell and hearing, and the ability to ignore high levels of pain. Regeneration is enhanced beyond anything thought possible. The nanobots are capable of directly stimulating the growth of cells ensuring that even major trauma can be healed within minutes, even lost limbs can be regenerated over a longer period of time. No major side effects are noted, although a few priests who have tested their ability over a longer period of time state that food does not seem to be sating their hunger.

#### Two months later.

One priest suffers what appears to be a psychotic episode and attacks another who has not yet been augmented with the nanobots. During the attack the victim is entirely drained of blood, though no one sees how this happened. After the episode the attacker calms and appears to be stable again,

if anything his enhanced physiology seems all the more potent. In the interests of progress he agrees to submit to a battery of tests. The results are shocking. It appears a flaw in the nanobots means that over time they somehow consume the energy out of their host's blood. The more their "augmentations" are used, the more they would consume. Proving ever adaptable, they also adapted their host to replenish their lost energy when they run low. In this case the priest had metal tubules that could extend out of the host's palm and drain the fluid out of the victim. Termed "Leeches" due to their appearance, further investigation reveals all the nanobot enhanced priests have equivalent devices, although these vary drastically. It is hypothesised that they can adapt to better suit the host.

#### Three months later.

All the augmented priests have now been forced to feed. Those that tried to resist were overridden by the nanobots, triggering the buried bestial instincts to feed. Despite this the augmented priests feel their experiment is a success. They are powerful, fast and nigh on unstoppable, thus balancing the need to feed at regular intervals. Those who have not been augmented do not all agree, seeing the need to consume blood as an abomination to the Imperium of Man. The resulting disagreement ends in a bloodbath with the augmented priests proving their newly gained superiority.

#### Two days later.

Some of the faction who were not augment managed to escape and bring word to the Emperor of their heinous research. Hearing of this, the augmented priests confidently revealed themselves, sure in that what they have created will be applauded. They were mistaken. The Emperor declares the work heretical and orders all research and any who have been augmented to be destroyed. The ensuing attack is short, however it does reveal two important facts. Firstly, one priest discovers he has the ability to transfer a portion of his nanobots to another, augmenting them as well. The augmentation is not as powerful as the progenitor, though they are still much more potent than normal humans. Also, it seems that despite being split over bodies, nanobots exchanged in this way can still communicate and are subservient to the progenitor host. Thus the progenitor has almost complete control over its offspring, though it is noted that the strong willed can counteract this somewhat. Secondly, a failed attempt at augmenting another resulted in a "zombie"-like result. Only a tiny portion of the nanobots managed to transfer before the connection was interrupted. The result was a body that was not augmented, although a failed attempt at augmenting the brain has still occurred. The recipient is left with a much reduced intelligence and will obey any command, proving to be fearless even in the face of their own death. Even with these discoveries, the augmented priests are overpowered and are

forced to flee, with many of their number being destroyed in the process.

#### Eighteen months later.

The tech-priests are now considered to be renegades. They have taken the name of Chiropteran, as they believe themselves to be human no longer, but something far more than human. Forced to constantly flee, they develop a hatred for humanity. Constant attacks have reduced the small fleet that managed to escape to a single ship. Twenty of the original augmented priests have survived along with many of their later offspring. Also on board are many humans. Some are willing, bought by promises of limitless power while some are captives, taken along to feed the Chiropterans.

Caught on the edge of a warpstorm, their damaged ship is flung towards a previously unknown star system. They have no option but to make an emergency landing on the closest planet. The resulting crash damages the ship beyond repair.

#### Two Days Later.

Many of the crew are suffering from radiation poisoning, even the Chiropterans themselves. What is left of the systems shows that the planet is bathed in radiation from a cluster of nearby suns. Though the ship's hull has kept them alive so far, without shielding it cannot do so for much longer. Further scans show that the whole planet is riddled with subterranean cayes.

#### One Day Later.

The entire crew evacuates, journeying to the nearest cave. The journey, though short, is deadly for many, with over one hundred men dying in the process. One of the Chiropterans reacts badly and is forever scarred, his flesh ugly and red. His lineage would go on to be one of the more bestial houses.

#### One week later.

The crew has found a safe haven. Deep underground they start to settle, ruled by the Chiropterans. Knowing that their supply of food could run out if the feed needlessly, the Chiropterans start taking care to feed before they lose control, and also not to kill their victims. Also a law is put into being that no more Chiropterans can be created without consensus of all, to ensure they do not have more to feed than they have food.

#### Seven months later.

The War of Conquest begins. Exploring the caves brings the Chiropterans and the humans to the planets indigenous inhabitants, who in the future will be known as the Cythor Fiends. Standing over seven feet tall, well-muscled, winged and with bulging eyes, they are well adapted to fighting in the perpetual night of the caves. Humans are easily killed and whilst the Chiropterans are vastly more powerful, some of them are destroyed, including one of the original progenitors.

#### Two months later.

The Chiropterans and humans have fallen back, giving up the system of caves that the had claimed. With less space to defend, they manage to hold their own while the Cythor Fiends attack without relent, their potent sonic weaponry able to blast apart even the most formidable of defences.

#### Two Weeks Later.

A vicious battle takes place, in which one of the original progenitor houses is destroyed except for the progenitor himself. Many are killed by the Fiends' sonic weaponry, yet for every wound caused the nanobots are learning and evolving. After this battle, a defence is finally perfected and the knowledge is transferred to all who are augmented. The result is an electromagnetic shielding that covers the skin of a host. The strength of the shielding varies on the generation, with the original progenitors having shields that could withstand even lascannon blasts, but more importantly it negates the sonic weaponry of the Cythor Fiends, whatever the generation of the nanobot host.

#### Eight months later.

The Cythor Fiends admit defeat. With their sonic weapons nullified they cannot match the Chiropterans for close combat prowess. An understanding is reached, allowing the Cythor Fiends to retain lands and their own heritage provided that they the follow the law of the Chiropterans.



### Vampire Powers

Written by MasterSpark

Teachings of Abhorash - Basic

#### The Severed



Model by Count Erick

#### Vampiric Powers

Defining the elite of the night Hello, and welcome to the continuation of my series on how to approach the options and choices that are open to your characters. In this issue we'll take a look at the various vampiric powers that are open to Vampire characters. I will try to spread light through my own experiences but I'll be the first to admit that I cannot cover any and all angles when it comes to using these. This is a personal reflection which will hopefully tip you off about uses that you might not have considered before, or just to be a good read.

A quick little note: you'll see that I've made a distinction between lord-level Vampire characters and those that are not at various places in the article. This is to highlight the different uses and effects that will come about when you take available combinations (or lack thereof) into account.

#### Spectral Form

Rendering the character immune to most conventional forms of damage (aside from combat resolution), Spectral Form will also allow him to join a unit of Ethereal beings where he can put his combat ability and vampiric marching-aura to good use. It is rather costly, however, and disallows him from taking any and all mounts or magical items. This will often mean that your Lord, while forcibly cheaper than what he could have been, will also be a lot more limited than he needs to be - he can go about fighting enemy grunts with little care of damage, but beware of enemy characters and units with magical attacks! Adding a Vampire to a unit of Wraiths (which would likely be the first thought to pop into mind) will add to their combat prowess, but not a whole lot, and especially not when you consider the cost. An ethereal hero Vampire can carry the army battle standard though, which would give a unit of Wraiths some further boosts in combat. All in all, I feel that this power could be pretty fun to try and have its uses, but that a more... mundane choice of power(s) for a Vampire will probably yield other, better results.

#### Ghoulkin

This power presents your army with the interest choice of having your units of Crypt Ghouls make an additional marching move before the battle commences. This can be a very useful tool to use when you've a need for speed to conquer your opponent, for example against those with a large amount of shooting attacks (where this added speed will let you reach them one turn sooner) or highly maneuverable hit & run-style units (where your Ghouls can begin to pressure your opponent to react to your movements straight of the bat). Another interesting facet to Ghoulkin is that it also allows any accompanying characters to make the bonus movement, often giving far-reaching Vampires (such as ones with the Flying Horror power or the Talisman of the Lycni artifact) a shot into and beyond the enemy lines on the first turn of the game - a powerful tool for hunting enemy war machines or for spreading Terror and disruption!

#### Supernatural Horror

Despite the plethora of unit types that are in one way or another Immune to Psychology these days, a Terror test still remains a potentially devastating tool when it strikes home.

Supernatural Horror can be seen as the slightly cheaper counterpart to the magical sword Skabscrath, giving you the option of using a Terror-causing character while retaining the choice of having it come out of your points

allowance for magic items or vampiric powers. The cost of Supernatural Horror is not really high enough to be considered prohibiting but it is often left out in favour of other combinations of powers and items (although it can really shine on a fast-moving Vampire like the ones mentioned above in the part about Ghoulkin). When taken into the context of the rest of the army list, there's already 5 other unit types with an inherent Terror-causing ability, making the spending of points on Supernatural Horror appear a bit superfluous at times. I would rate it as a good and solid choice unless you have another, more important task at hand for the character which will require his points allowance.

#### The Arkayne



Model by Balthazaar

#### Master of the Black Arts

Vampire Lords: With the inherent magical nature of the Vampire Lord, the Master of the Black Arts will serve to turn your Lord into a real powerhouse in the magic phase. With a full load-out together with Dark Acolyte and the additional Wizard Level available in the army list, he can reach a total of 8 power dice for use in his own magic phase, counting both the dice he generates himself and the ones from the army's collective pool (making it 9 if you include the Black Periapt and its effects!). If you intend to use a Vampire Lord that has dedicated himself to the arts of slinging spells, this power will always be a good buy.

Vampire Heroes: Unlike Vampire Lords, the Master of the Black Arts is more of a shaky investment when it comes to your hero choices. It will eat up all of the Vampire's pointsallowance for Powers, leaving him stuck as a level 1 Wizard and without any choice for mundane gear. While having a level 1 Wizard generate 3 power dice on his own in your magic phases can be a tasty treat, remember that he won't be able to roll with any significant amount of dice at the same time due to his lowly Wizard Level. His flexibility will be further decreased when you take into account that he'll only get to roll for a single, randomly determined spell from the Lore of Vampires as well. If you wish for the Vampire to be casting little else but Invocation of Nehek and Raise Dead this power can still be worthwhile, although I would personally prefer the Dark Acolyte power as my own choice here.

#### Forbidden Lore

Vampire Lords: Continuing from above, coupling a large amount of power dice with having the knowledge of an entire lore of magic is an impressive feat – and it's all within the points allowance as well! The Vampire will have at his disposal the full use of any one of the lores found the Rule Book or the Lore of the Vampires from the Army Book, which can be selected before the start of the battle just like the normal spell-selection process. This gives you a possibility to choose your lore depending on your opponent to better counter his forces, although I feel that the Lore of the Vampires

often works best due to the synergy it has with the rest of the Vampire Counts army book. An important thing to also note is that the Vampire will get to keep the Invocation of Nehek even if he does not choose the Lore of the Vampires.

Vampire Heroes: Much like the Master of the Black Arts power above, the Forbidden Lore is significantly diminished in effect when wielded by a hero-level Vampire. The points cost is large enough to deny him access to being a level 2 Wizard, which means that he'll be stuck knowing an entire lore of magic, yet only generate a single dice of his own to use it with. You can certainly dig into your army's pool dice to increase his magic output but even so, he will still be stuck with using 2 dice at most when casting, due to his paltry Wizard Level. It could be coupled with a pair of Power Stones to give him a temporary boost in power, so there is still some use for this

power on a hero choice although I feel that the points could be spent better elsewhere.

#### Dark Acolyte

This power gives you the opportunity to bump up your Vampires' Wizard Levels up a notch for a reasonable points cost. Stepping your hero-level Vampires up from level 1 to 2 makes for a substantial difference in their magical effectiveness - both dice-wise and in their flexibility – while Vampire Lords are able to reach the lofty heights of level 4 Wizardry. The cost of this ability is shy enough to let you combine it with other Powers and item

combinations in an efficient way (if you're willing to pay the points for it, having an otherwise hack'n'slashing Vampire Lord can easily accommodate him being a level 4 Wizard as well, with only a slight investment from his points allowance made in non-fighty things). Likewise, hero-level Vampires can also attain a Warrior-Mage status by combining Dark Acolyte with the Avatar of Death power, or by giving them The Flayed Hauberk. All in all, this power is a good and solid buy for most occasions.

Author's note on The Arkayne powers and their selection: A quick glance at the points cost of the above three powers will tell you that they cannot all be combined on a single character, not even on a Vampire Lord. So: which ones should you go for to achieve the most influential magic phase? Well, there is a general consensus that Master of the Black Arts coupled with

Forbidden Lore and the additional magic level bought from the army list is the best combination for a powerful Caster Lord. Not having Dark Acolyte will have you lose out on a power dice, but the Forbidden Lore will take care of your spell selection and being a level 3 Wizard with the Master of the Black Arts power will still give him enough dice to make his presence known on the battlefield, though you might consider having Dark Acolyte in place of Forbidden Lore if you find yourself starving for casting dice.



#### The Bestialle



Model by Malface

#### Flying Horror

Granting the Vampire the ability to fly, the Flying Horror power will give the character an unmatched mobility while still being able to hide away inside a friendly unit, which wouldn't be the case if you were to put him on a Hellsteed instead. This power can provide a very effective surprise factor for your opponent when the Vampire suddenly leaps out of his unit and plants himself behind the enemy lines where he'll be free to stalk victims of his choice. As a defensive tool, Flying Horror can also let an important character (such as your army general) scoot out of his hiding place if things start to look bleak. A flying Wizard will be tough for the enemy to catch and destroy unless they have the

right means to deal with him/her and can use said means properly, which is easier said than done. The points cost is not exactly prohibiting, although it will make your hero-level Vampires unable to obtain an increased Wizard Level.

#### Infinite Hatred

This power will undoubtedly increase any Vampire's efficiency in close combat, letting him re-roll all of his misses in every round of close combat. What's especially interesting with this power is that mounts get to benefit from any psychology which affects the rider, meaning that a Zombie Dragon or Abyssal Terror will also get to re-roll their hits, although only in the first round of combat as with regular Hatred. The cost of this power is such that, if you intend for the Vampire in question to be very effective in close combat, you really should consider slapping this power on him.\* Hatred does bring an unsightly disadvantage with it though, you will be forced into pursuit and overrun moves without any choice in the matter. Clever opponents can use this to trap and draw your Vampire (and most often his unit as well!) out of position - try to keep this in mind and not let your opponent take advantage of this weakness.

\*This need not apply if the character wields either the Dreadlance or the Sword of Striking. These two weapons will augment his chances of scoring hits to such a degree that Hatred will be unnecessary.

#### Hunter in the Dark

A Vampire with the ability to Scout will be able to deploy outside of his own deployment zone, as long as he can remain out of sight of the enemy army and at least a short distance away. I would personally not recommend that you spend the points for this power since Vampires have a few other, more conventional alternatives for increasing their movement rate (flying, the Talisman of the Lycni etc.), which will ultimately accomplish much of the same thing as scouting. However, you could have a definite use for a scouting Vampire if you were to place him in a piece of terrain where you'd otherwise expect your opponent to place a scouting unit of his own. This is a risky prospect, since you'll need to win the D6 roll-off to determine who gets to place his Scouts first. All in all, I believe that there are better investments. There's still something to be said for placing the Vampire even after all other characters though...

#### The Martialle



Model by Boo

#### **Red Fury**

Vampire Lords: With all of the offensive items and gadgets available to a Vampire Lord, slapping the Red Fury power on top of that will push his killing potential into overdrive. It will eat up a good chunk of his points allowance but there are few tools greater than this for the dedicated warrior. To further increase the offensive output it is recommended that you also give the Vampire a magical weapon to use his power with, although it will not work when a Great Weapon is wielded. The Dreadlance in particular forms a frightening duo with Red Fury – on the charge,

the Vampire will kill many enemy models on a single roll of a 2+ to wound (due to the hits being automatic with the Lance), each wound caused granting him a single additional attack, again benefitting from the Lance's effects. If not using the Dreadlance it is advisable that you give him something else to aid his accuracy in order to capitalize on this expensive power. The Sword of Striking or Hatred (from either the power or the Strigos banner) both work well. You might also want to consider using Red Fury in combination with the Beguile power which will let you re-roll failed rolls to wound against a chosen enemy, provided that they do not pass a heavily modified leadership test.

Vampire Heroes: Being more limited in the selection of magical items and raw physical might, Red Fury will be hard-pressed to live up to its true potential when given to a hero Vampire. Like with Vampire Lords, some kind of accuracy-increasing gadgets are recommended here, with the Royal Standard of Strigos being a popular choice (since the Sword of Striking would limit the Vampire to strike with Strength 5, which will hurt a hero Vampire more than it would a Lord who has access to additional powers to boost the output). A setup of my own devising that has proved to work well when hunting Hydras (and they need to be hunted!) included Red Fury and The Balefire Spike in a unit of Black Knights with the Strigos Standard. On the charge he will hit on 3+ with re-rolls and wound on 2+ whilst disallowing the Hydra its

saves, causing a number of wounds when you take Red Fury into account. For specific tasks such as the one before I think that Red Fury can do well on a hero Vampire, but for general use I feel that there are more solid powers to be bought, or boosting other parts of the army with the same points.

#### Dread Knight

This is an easy one – it provides the Vampire with a set of basic gear, including a Lance and enough armour to total a 2+ armour save. If you have a Vampire that you want to send into close combat, buying him this power will not disappoint you. Remember that there is nothing to stop a character mounted on a horse from joining a unit of infantry, but GW has FAQ'd the power to make it so that the Vampire *must* keep his Barded Nightmare. In other words, you cannot purchase the Dread Knight power for the items it provides and then replace the horse with a Zombie Dragon (for example). Bottom line: Dread Knight is a good buy.

#### Avatar of Death

Like the Dread Knight power above, turning your Vampire into an Avatar of Death will give him access to conventional mundane equipment. It is slightly cheaper than Dread Knight but will also provide you with less. However, this slight difference in cost makes it possible to use the Avatar of Death power together with Dark Acolyte, turning the Vampire into a level 2 Wizard decked out for combat (and we all know how cool those are!). Of the choices that this

power will provide you, I personally like the defensive ways of the Shield the best. The Great Weapon is a good way of producing something

with Strength 7 to bash Chariots and highly armoured opponents, but the option for an Additional Hand Weapon is one that I'm not very fond of at all - it provides little defense and cannot be used in conjunction with a magical weapon. A favourite combination of my own is to give a Vampire the Avatar of Death (Great Weapon) and Dark Acolyte powers, and also hand him the Enchanted Shield. He will then be able to opt between using his standard Hand Weapon with the Enchanted Shield for a 2+ armour save in close combat, or whip out his Great Weapon for when the situation calls for some truly devastating attacks. On top of this, he's also a second-level Wizard - all in all, quite a competent leader for a unit of infantry.

#### The Courtly



Model by Hardt von Carstein

While expensive, the Aura of Dark Majesty does have a couple of valid uses that are worthy of consideration. With a 6 inch radius-of-effect it meshes quite conveniently when the character forces the enemy to take a Terror test, either by being mounted on a monstrous mount, having the Supernatural Horror power or by carrying the sword Skabscrath. It can also form a very potent combination with the spell 'Doom and Darkness' from the Lore of Death (accessible through the Forbidden Lore), bringing upon your enemy a -4 negative modifier for his leadership tests! Aside from combining it with other tricks and spells, do note that as the Aura states that it lowers the leadership statistic of an enemy unit (a hard -1 modifier to their

leadership for as long as they're within range), it will aid the Ghostly Howl of your Tomb Banshees - this can be a very favourable thing if you can bring these two components to bear on a powerful target (greater daemons spring to mind here). It will also affect any stubborn troops within its range, which can be quite helpful depending on the opposition at hand (\*cough\* Dark Elf Black Guard \*cough\*). However, the cost of this power will prohibit your Vampire Lord (to which I feel it is best suited) from becoming the consummate warrior or wizard that he could otherwise have been, and the effects of the Aura of Dark Majesty are not always very easy to take advantage of to justify this cost.

#### Walking Death

Cheap and cheerful, this ability will let you add an additional point of combat resolution at the end of every round of close combat. With Fear being as powerful a weapon as it is, having this ability to help you beat the amassed combat resolution of your enemy can be a lifesaver at times, while never being without its use - even in a losing round of combat, having an additional point to your resolution will cause one less of your Undead models to crumble. Do note, however, that having multiple instances of Walking Death involved in a combat (even one between multiple units) will not provide you with more than a single bonus modifier. For a Vampire assigned to lead one of your units into combat, you will not go astray by giving him this power.

#### Beguile

The choice for the serious duelist, the Beguile power will give your Vampire the ability to re-roll his failed rolls to wound against a single chosen enemy model, provided that they cannot pass a leadership test with a -3 modifier. Beguile will not work quite as well against regular rank and file opponents (affecting only one of them as it is) as it will against characters, monsters and other such imposing enemies. As mentioned earlier, it will form a particularly good combination with the Red Fury power and especially so if the Dreadlance is also being used the hits will be automatic and your failed wounding-attempts will (hopefully) be re-rolled! A word of advice though: you should not be too quick to throw an important character such as a Vampire (or even your Lord) head-first into combat with enemy characters – potent fighters as they might be, there are opponents out there that will give even the best-equipped Vampire Lord a run for his money, which is made even worse when you consider what the VC loses with every fallen character. Beguile is certainly a worthy addition for a combat Vampire but by no means a necessity.

#### The Master



Model by ZigoR

Author's note on the following vampiric powers: It is my own personal belief that the powers available from this section are powerful beyond what is reasonable and thus I shy away from using them in my own army lists. Increasing the size of core units (outside of Zombies, they're a justified case in my opinion) without actually upping the amount of victory points that your opponent will get from destroying said units is a ridiculous advantage – simply obtaining the +1 to cast the Invocation on these units would've been enough for the low cost of these powers, in my reckoning. Anyway, I certainly won't judge anyone who thinks different from me in this case; I just felt that it'd be appropriate of me to relay some of my own mind here.:)

### Lord of the Dead, Summon Creatures of the Night, Summon Ghouls

I feel that a distinction between these powers would not be necessary, since the general formula is simple - if you have any of the applicable units in your army list and you want more of them without paying hard points for it, invest in a couple of the corresponding powers for your Vampires. They're cheap enough to be bought in combination with other powers without hindering specialization, though keep in mind that you'll want to have as many power dice as possible to use with them - a Caster Lord is the most popular choice for bearing one of these powers, along with a couple of attending Dark Acolytes. When it comes to Summon Creatures of the Night, do note that since Fell Bats and Bat Swarms are listed under the heading for Infantry in the unit chart at the back of the army book, they will recover D6 wounds from each casting of the Invocation of Nehek.

In conclusion, customizing your own Vampire characters can bring about a large amount of varying combinations between these vampiric powers and the available magical items. You're pretty much able to tailor fit one to perform whichever task you have in mind (bar firing missile weapons), making them a very diverse group of creatures to include in your army. I hope that this has been of some help to you. Happy gaming!:)

### Undead Beasts

A Painting Guide by The Dark Sheep

#### The Dark Arts

Accompanying the hordes of walking corpses that make up a Vampire Counts army are the undead beasts. Slavering wolves threaten the enemy from the flanks while monstrous bats swoop down from the skies in search of easy prey. Men turn and flee in terror at their sight, only to find themselves hunted down by the very beasts they run from.

#### The Skin

Here in this article I'll demonstrate how to paint the various undead beasts that are at a vampire lord's disposal. Even though it is a Dire Wolf that I have chosen for this tutorial, the techniques I show, and the colour schemes you choose can still be used on the other beasts such as Fell Bats and Varghulfs. I do in fact recommend that you take this approach because a common colour scheme brings unity to any army.

#### You will need the following paints:

- Scorched Brown
- Bestial Brown
- Graveyard Earth
- Devlan Mud
- Charadon Granite
- Adeptus Battle Grey
- Astronomican Grey
- Badab Black





#### Step 1

I was looking to achieve a warm brown colour when painting the skin of this wolf, and thus I started with a basecoat of Scorched Brown. A thing that cannot be mentioned enough times are that basecoats should normally be applied in very thin layers, so a bit of water was added to the base colour. This is a preventive effort made to avoid any obscurity of detail at a later stage, and thus, if you want a nice result, it is very important that this is done properly.

Most of the Dire Wolves have cracks in their skin, and these areas will require more attention when trying to get an even layer of paint. Fluid paint will namely flow into these recesses, and if not removed the paint will pool up and ruin the details. Control the paint with the brush and "suck up" any excess paint where you can.



#### Step 2

For the mid tone, which will help establish the overall look of the skin, I went for Bestial Brown. Using a stiff, short bristled brush I applied the paint in a heavy drybrush. A heavy drybrush differs from a normal drybrush in two ways; the brush shouldn't be just as completely dry, and more weight should be put on it than normal. As always it can easily be overdone, so in order to get the right result I recommend that you start with a lighter drybrush and work your way up to a satisfying result.



#### Step 3

The third highlight was done with Graveyard Earth and was applied with a much lighter drybrush than was used in the previous step. The amount of paint on the brush and the pressure used will define the outcome, so be careful about wiping off the brush before you start painting.

If you feel like making an as realistic looking miniature as possible you can try giving the most prominent areas a slightly heavier drybrush. This gives the impression of light reflecting from the worn out leather that is the wolf's skin.



#### Step 4

A liberal wash of Devlan Mud was applied to all the skin areas of the model. The purpose of this step is to tone everything down and tie the colours together. Because the previously used colours are very different in appearance it is important to make them look more alike. In this case the Devlan Mud will act as a filter that heavily tints all the colours beneath.

To better understand how a wash works you can compare the picture in the last step with the one from this step. Looking at the pictures you should be able to see that it is the brighter areas that are affected the most by the wash. The dark areas on the other hand are much the same. Overall you'll thus get a slightly flatter model with little contrast, but seeing as you can now highlight the model it is a preferable approach.



#### Step 5

As mentioned at the end of the previous step it is a good idea to retouch the washed area with paint to make up for some of the lost contrasts. The colour I then chose to highlight with is the very same that was used for this exact purpose prior to the wash, namely Graveyard Earth. The difference is that this time around I used a fine brush and carefully painted all the edges with slightly watered down paint.

Once that was done I had a good look at the model under some good light and took note of where the wash had left the skin a bit brighter than its surroundings. I then highlighted these areas with more lines of Graveyard Earth. This last highlight of the skin's "mainland" is not necessary to produce a convincing result, but I like how it gives the feel of old, faded leather, and besides the model gets a slightly brighter look without having to go over the top.



#### The Fur

To match the dire wolf's otherwise warm feel I chose Charadon Granite to act as the basecoat. This particular paint namely contains both greens and browns, and thus goes well with the browns of the skin. Adeptus Battlegrey was then heavily drybrushed over the hair before it was followed by a lighter drybrush of Astronomican Grey. When painting fur texture such as this it is important not to stroke the brush with the hairs, and especially when the brush isn't completely dry. The bristles namely tend to get caught in the recesses, and you'll end up with the highlight colour obscuring the darker shadows. A good idea is to brush either diagonally or across the hairs. Finally a glaze (1:3 Badab Black and Water) was applied to the fur to tie the greys together and dull down the most extreme highlights.

#### The Details

There are of course other things than fur and skin to undead beasts that need attention. Here I'll give my thoughts on how to paint a few of these details.

You will need the following paints: Red Gore, Blood Red, Baal Red, Badab Black, Leviathan Purple, Khemri Brown, Devlan Mud, Bleached Bone, Skull White, Various orange/yellow paints

#### **Muscle and Wounds**

I simply painted a basecoat of Red Gore onto every area of exposed muscle and. As soon as that was dry some Blood Red was heavily drybrushed over this. Blood Red is a special colour in that it might need several coats to cover properly, but here I just went with a single layer of highlights. A 3:3:1 mix of Badab Black, Leviathan Purple and Baal Red was liberally washed over the red to create definition and add vibrancy and a sense of "life" to the wounds.

#### Bone

I used the exact same method when painting the exposed bone as I demonstrated in a skeleton painting tutorial in the first Issue of The Invocation. Check it out via this link: Here

#### **Glowing Eyes**

To get the effect of glowing orange-y eyes I applied a wealth of different colours to the little eyeball. Naturally I started with a dark red before I then worked my way upwards through orange until I got to a nice and bright yellow. I worked in towards the middle of the eye, trying to cover an increasingly smaller area with every layer. This resulted in a nice transition from dark red to bright yellow. I finished by adding a tiny dot of pure white to the middle of the glow before thinned out Gryphonne Sepia was washed over the eyeball.

#### **Alternative Approaches**

The colours and techniques used in the example above are by no means the only way to paint undead beasts. Some models might even differ so much from other beasts that an entirely different approach needs to be taken.



Here I have demonstrated how you can tie your wolves and bats together by simply using the same colour scheme. Despite their differences both model types share the basic texture types; where the wolf has naked skin showing, the bat has large leathery wing. The fur is obviously also a common trait. There are even spines and horns sticking out of the Fell Bat's backs, so you'll actually get some bone in on those models as well. There is one difference though and that is the fact that the bat also has some skin showing in addition to the wings. Thus I had to come up with another colour for those parts. In the end I chose a neutral black, just to avoid any obvious colour differences.

If you have other colour preferences, it should be easy to simply use the same technique demonstrated in this tutorial, only with different colours. Simply replace the base colour and highlight colour with something suitable and find a few good mid tones. Darker/brighter shades of brown or grey/black would be natural choices for the skin, but there is nothing stopping you from going with more unusual colour choices. Just use your imagination and never stop experimenting.



### The Recrarch Bloodline

Written by Get of W'soran

Undead Alchemists and Wizards that few can match.

#### Introduction

The Term "Necrarch" refers to a vampires of the bloodline descended from W'soran who was High Priest of Lahmia and Prince of Rasetra whom was consumed by his greatest and eldest known apprentice Melkhior who was also the vampire that invented the name Necrarch and claimed himself Master of the Line.

#### Appearance

Necrarchs appear to be little more than reeking, rotten wizards and few can look upon the horrific visage of the Necrarch Vampire without feeling dread. They often wear robes, usually of a poor state due to many centuries worth of wear and often carry with them items of power such as Magical Staves and other items of an arcane nature.

#### Common Goals

As a bloodline the Necrarchs share a number of common goals due to their nature.

First and foremost is their search for knowledge, the subject of such knowledge may vary dependant on the vampire in question however there is one topic on which all study for their entire unholy life-span and that is Necromancy.

They are perhaps the greatest Necromancers in existence after the great Liches such as Nagash and Arkhan the Black. They also tend to gather magical artefacts which can make them powerful individuals to face in combat as they can bend the arcane and wield these artefacts to devastating effect.

Of all the vampire lines they are one of the least likely to march to war for they care nothing of temporal power and are more likely to fight for knowledge or arcane lore, there is no greater example of this than Nourgul the Black. When they do march to war however they are perhaps the most dangerous of all vampire-kind as with their knowledge of Necromancy they can raise huge hordes of undead.

Another goal that almost all the Necrarchs seem to share is the wish for a world of undeath, for such a world would be eternal and have true order. To this end they cast their great dark spells, spreading corruption throughout the land, the spells kill the land they touch, poisoning rivers, withering plant life and all living animals and men are stricken ill.

#### **Traits**

Of all the bloodlines they are the greatest wizards and scholars amongst all vampires. They tend to be more intelligent, even geniuses, making them incredible scholars and have a higher level of magical aptitude than others of their kind, making them powerful Magi.

Necrarchs are severely different to other vampires; most notably in appearance although they also are differ in their ability to avoid drinking blood for massively long periods of time; these two traits are closely linked.

To understand this trait one must first have knowledge of the seven elements that the Liche Priests say composes every mortal intelligent and self-aware being. These Seven Parts are:

*Kha-* This is the Mortal Shell, the physical body of the being.

Ka- Reason, the ego and abstract thought.

Ba- Emotion and one's subconscious self.

Ab- Freedom of Choice, Awareness of what is right and wrong and the freedom to choose between those two moral choices.

Sekhem- The Life force itself or Aethyric energy.

Ren- Ones True Name, the name being specific to the individual being that it belongs to. Perhaps it could be better described as ones self and individuality, it is a difficult concept to comprehend. One way to view it is that the people of Nehekhara believed that to destroy one's Ren was to destroy all memory of that person after their death and thus undoing all that was achieved throughout their life.

*Khaibit-* The Shadow which all people had which was prove of one's mortality. So anything with a shadow could be destroyed or at the very least altered by time.

The Soul was called Akhu and it was the immortal and incorporeal person that was a Blend of Ka, Ab, Ba, Ren and Sekhem. The Akhu does not necessarily stay safe after death as beings such as Demons or Gods may consume it in part or whole.

It should be noted that a vampire has to consume blood to absorb another's Sekhem to feed their own need for Sekhem that they can no longer get as a vampire's soul is cut of from the Aethyr.

Due to a Necrarch's scholarly nature he will, in his loner lifestyle, need to feed himself in other ways than blood due to the feeding sources being limited. W'soran and his disciples found another method which was to substitute the Sekhem that their undead forms needed by drawing dark magic into their bodies straight from the winds of magic. Saturating themselves in such dark energy causes the Necrarchs' form to become corrupted and rotting so that, in time, they will resemble little more than reeking skeletal corpses. Whilst not a trait available only to the Necrarch bloodline it is they who possess the greatest knowledge of using this form of feeding and who are the least afraid to take on this disgusting form. This indulgence in Dark Magic may also contribute to the high level of insanity found within the Necrarch line.

Another trait of these vampires is that, as they become older, their vision upon the mortal realm begins to fade away and instead they see it as through shadows. They no longer see mortal things but only the winds of magic, spirits and auras. They can still see everything a mortal could see but in a very different way, instead of peoples' physical selves the Necrarch sees only their spirits and aethyric echoes of physical things like buildings.

#### Lairs

Necrarchs tend to live in remote locations, often residing within tall towers from which they can gaze upon the stars and work their divinations. Within these lairs there will often be a horde of magical items ranging from tomes of arcane knowledge to artefacts with Magical properties.

It is a rare thing for anyone, mortal or immoral alike, to come across a home of a Necrarch, for these loners ensure they stay hidden from sight. Even rarer is the one who finds such a place and survives to tell the tale.

#### Servants and Armies

Necrarchs tend to take in any mortal Necromancer with considerable intellect, perhaps hoping to one day make them their immortal apprentices. They also have day-time servants whom include many deformed men. The Necrarch cares not for physical appearance and will often show false pity to these pathetic humans in an attempt to win their loyalty.

The army of a Necrarch will often consist of a horde of zombies and other undead such as spirit hosts. Often, this force tends to defeat any enemies through sheer weight of numbers. The vampire's army will also hold necromantic constructs such as the Zombie Dragon, a creature that is rarely seen with the other bloodlines. Only the Great Necrarch Necromancers could hope to raise such a creature into undeath!

#### Famous Necrarch

of Khemri.

There are few known Necrarch's in the old world to the point that many imperial scholars believe that they do not even exist. This is of course nonsense, known members of the line include:

Wsoran The first of the line, assisting in the creation of the Elixir of Life that granted vampirism to the Trueborn.

He was born as a Prince of a Nehekharan City and at some point during the earlier stages of his life he may have moved to Khemri and joined the Mortuary Cult under Nagash, coming to serve the High Priest after a time. Ten years prior to Nagash's defeat he and his disciples travelled to Lahmia, pretending to be

outcasts yet still secretly serving the Great King

Once Nagash fell W'soran found himself in a place of authority within Lahmia and stayed there, he came to convince the Queen Neferatem (who would later be known as Neferata) that it was unjust for women not be accepted into the priesthood and so taught her incantations and magic in secret. The pinnacle of his manipulation was in convincing the Queen to not only save a heretical text of Nagash but also use it to concoct the Elixir of Life with his assistance and thus create vampirism; he can as such be seen as the Father of vampirism.

When the Vampire Trueborn fled from Nagash in fear of his wrath, W'soran and his disciples stayed behind to serve the Great Necromancer. He only fled once Nagash was struck down by Alcadizaar, taking one of Nagash's legendary tomes with him as he did so.

It is unknown where he went after this; some sources believe he may have returned to Lahmian with a Cadre of sired Disciples but there are a few truths that are recorded and known.

During the time after Nagash's defeat, W'soran renounced the idea of a World of the Dead, an Empire of Undeath, to be not enough and so instead of trying to conquer the world of the living, he decided to obtain dominion over the Spirit Realm. However, he became decadent spending long periods of time in a trance state, travelling the spirit realm, and so left himself vulnerable. One Night, whilst in such a trance, he was killed and consumed by his greatest apprentice Melkhior who took W'soran's prized tome and fled.

Thus was the end of the Father of Vampirism and the Founder of the Necrarch Line.

*Melkhior the Ancient* - Eldest get (or at least eldest known surviving get) of W'soran, he killed and consumed his sire to gain great power. He also claimed the Tome of Nagash that had once been his master's. His actions since then are

largely unknown although his research seems to revolve around trying to make man understand how he can benefit from joining the undead and overcome their fear of the living dead. Countless mortals have died at the hands of this mad vampire in his search; their deaths are often those of incredible agony and pain.

It is said that in his dark tower he paints horrific pictures of a world of death, where the dead wander the earth and no living thing grows. It is said that he has been overthrown and defeated by his apprentice, Zacharias, destroying much of his tower during the battle and that he now sleeps, hidden, in a slumber spanning centuries to regain his power so that he may search out his betrayer and destroy him.

Zacharias the Everliving-Zacharias started his life as a Necromancer searching out forbidden knowledge, he learnt of Melkhior's Tome of Nagash and so went out in search of the tower, which he eventually found.

He was captured by Melkhior servants and then sired by the ancient Necrarch. He soon found himself rotting away and was disgusted by his new form, but he would soon embraced his new power. After biding his time, Zacharias, during one of Melkhior's insane fits, tried to steal his sire's most precious piece of property, his tome of Nagash. However, he was captured and almost killed by the elder vampire, barely escaping the tower.

He fled into the Middle Mountains but was pursued by Melkhior's servants. Emaciated from lack of blood and drained from the fighting, Zacharias stumbled into a large cavern where he fell into a deep slumber which would last for over a decade. During this time a Black Dragon also found the cave and unknowing that the vampire also slumbered within made her nest there. When Zacharias awoke he was so overcome by his thirst than he sunk his fangs straight into the underbelly of the great dragon, draining the fabled beast of its blood.

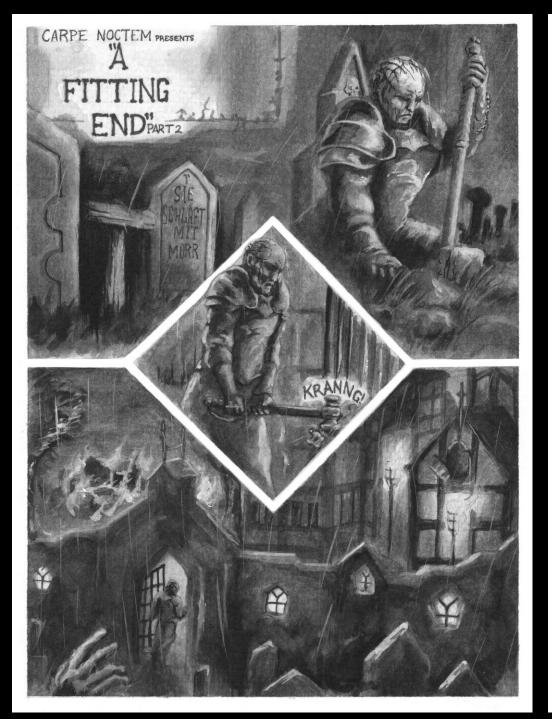
It is said that drinking the blood of a dragon frees a vampire from their desire to drink blood and who knows what other powers Zacharias may have gained.

Nourgul the Black-This Necrarch invaded Estalia and assaulted the Temple of Myrmidia in an attempt to seize the Great Book of Wisdom, the vampire led a bloody campaign just to reach it, only to be eviscerated into dust when he touched the tome.

*Madame Kalfon-* Madame Kalfon is a child, or was when she was turned. She specialises in making fun little 'playthings' by stitching random creatures together and giving them life using necromancy.

Details for W'soran – Master of the Necrarchs, can be found elsewhere in this issue - DoN

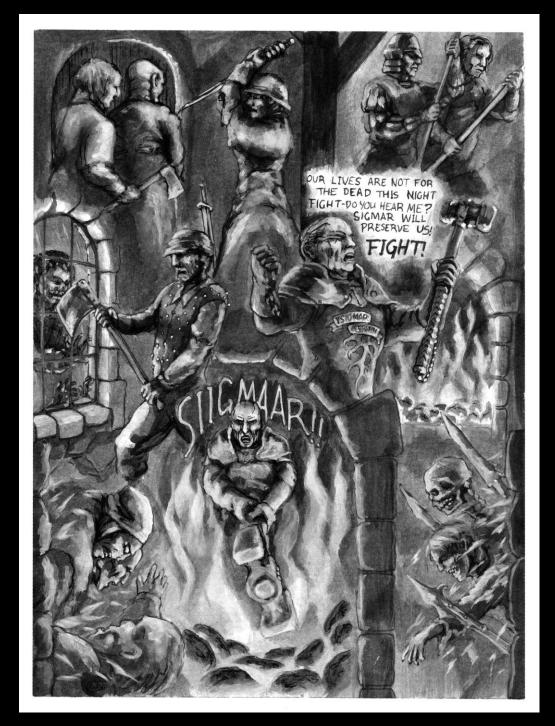
















### W'soran – Father of the Necrarchs

Background and Descriptions by Get of W'soran Rules by MasterSpark

#### Masters of the Night

W'soran-The first of the line that assisted in the creation of the Elixir of Life that granted vampirism to the Trueborn. He was born as the Prince of Rasetra and at some stage during the earlier stages of his life he may have moved to Khemri and joined the Mortuary Cult under Nagash, coming to serve the High Priest after a time.

Ten years prior to Nagash's defeat he and his disciples travelled to Lahmia pretending to be outcasts yet still secretly serving the Great King of Khemri. Once Nagash fell, W'soran found himself in a place of authority within Lahmia and stayed there. He rose through the ranks to eventually become the Grand Vizier to the Queen.

Now in a place where he could work his manipulations, he began to turn the Queen's mind, filling it with anger that he could use. He came to convince the Queen Neferatem (who would later be known as Neferata) that it was unjust for women not be accepted into the priesthood, and so taught her incantations and magic in secret.

The pinnacle of his manipulation was in convincing the Queen to not only save a heretical text of Nagash from the sacking of Khemri, but also use it to concoct the a variation of Nagash's Elixir of Life with his assistance and thus create Vampirism; hence he can as such be seen as the Father of Vampirism.

During the coming years he stayed at Neferatem's side, providing advice and insight, although it was always to serve either his own of Nagash's ends. Such was the trust the queen had in him, that no one was more trusted until finally one arrived who ousted him from his close position to Neferatem's side: Vashanesh.

When the Vampire Trueborn fled from Nagash in fear of his wrath W'soran and his disciples stayed behind to serve the Great Necromancer. He only fled once Nagash was struck down by Alcadizaar, taking one of Nagash's legendary tomes with him as he ran. It is unknown where he went after this; some sources believe he may have returned to Lahmia with a cadre of sired disciples but there are a few truths that are recorded and known.

During the time after Nagash's defeat W'soran became to find the idea of a World of the Dead, an Empire of Undeath, to be not enough and so instead of trying to conquer the world of the living he decided to study as to obtain dominion over the Spirit Realm. However, he became decadent, spending long periods of time in a Trance State, traveling the Spirit Realm and so left himself vulnerable. One Night, whilst in such a trance, he was killed and consumed by his greatest apprentice Melkhior who took the tome and fled.

Thus was the end of the Father of Vampirism and the Founder of the Necrarch Line.

#### W'soran - Founder and Master of the Necrarch Bloodline

M	WS	BS	S	T	W	Ι	Α	LD
6	6	5	5	5	4	6	4	10

Points: W'soran costs 635 points and uses up a single Lord choice.

#### Weapons and Equipment

W'soran carries a mundane dagger which he uses to deadly effect in close combat. He carries with him into battle one of the nine Books of Nagash, a Supply of Warpstone and is himself garbed in the Dark Lord's Vestment.

#### Magic

W'soran is a level 4 Wizard. He knows the Invocation of Nehek, The Great Awakening (see the Book of Nagash) and 6 other spells. See his special rule 'Innermost Forbidden Lore' for more information.

#### Vampiric Powers

W'soran has got the Master of the Black Arts power as well as the special 'Innermost Forbidden Lore' power that is exclusive to him alone.

#### Mount

W'soran may ride an Abyssal Terror at an additional cost of +155 points.

#### **Enchanted Item**

#### Dark Lord's Vestment

The robes granted to W'soran by Nagash himself, they once declared him as being amongst the Great Necromancer's highest Lieutenants. Whilst the master may be gone, his enchantments remain, healing the Vampiric wearer with Dark Magic.

W'soran is granted Regeneration, which is passed on to his Abyssal Terror if he has chosen to ride one. It will not in any way benefit a unit that he has joined.

#### Arcane Item

#### Supply of Warpstone

Solidified Dhar, these Warpstones were granted to W'soran by the Great Necromancer for his loyal and diligent service. Whilst to the living the substance would be highly dangerous, in the hands of a powerful undead wizard such as W'soran they become an incredibly powerful source of arcane energy.

W'soran carries an unlimited number of these sorcerous stones (they count as Power Stones). He can use one of them in each of his own magic phases.

#### Arcane Item

#### Book of Nagash

Nagash created the art of Necromancy itself, forging many tomes of knowledge in the process, the greatest of which where known as the "Nine Books of Nagash". One of these coveted tomes was granted to W'soran by the Great Necromancer in recognition of his loyalty. The tome holds many powerful spells for the raising of the dead.

The Book of Nagash grants W'soran knowledge of the spell 'The Great Awakening'. It has a casting value of 15+ and follows the rules for the standard 'Summon Undead Horde' spell (though note that he may not raise a unit of Zombies with it), except that W'soran may roll a total of 4D6 to determine how many wounds he can restore to his army. As opposed to the 'Summon Undead Horde' spell, W'soran may channel the magic to recover up to 2 wounds to any Vampire, Ethereal or non-infantry unit/character, instead of just a single wound. This spell may bring units of Zombies, Skeletons, Dire Wolves, Bat Swarms and Fell Bats above their starting size.

#### Special Rules

Vampire

Undead

#### Innermost Forbidden Lore

The Necrarchs would become masters of the darkest of magic lores. W'soran, being the foremost of his kind, has delved deeply into the arts most often frowned upon by mortal society - the realms of Darkness and Death hold no secrets to him.

W'soran may choose any 6 spells from the lores of Death, Shadow and Vampires instead of rolling for his spells.

#### **Unholy Cynosure**

During the fall of Lahmia W'soran displayed his abilities in the newly created art of Necromancy, making him perhaps the first practitioner after Nagash himself. In the years after, during his servitude to the Great Necromancer, W'soran assisted in Nagash's experiments to become not only a great master of the art but also a creator of many elements practiced in later times.

W'soran has +1 on his attempts to cast spells (any spells, no matter from which lore they are chosen), and the range of all spells chosen from the Lore of the Vampires is increased by 6". This includes the spells 'Invocation of Nehek' and 'The Great Awakening'.

#### Walking the Spirit-plane

Like many of his elder progeny, W'soran now sees more of the Spirit Realm than the Physical world itself, making the dead much more glorious to his eyes than the living. During battle W'soran can enter a light trance to scratch this other realm and communicate with the spirits that lie within, the spectres whispering to W'soran secrets of the winds of magic. However, such abilities do not come without a price and can strain the vampire's already unstable mind to the point of complete insanity."

W'soran may re-roll up to 3 dice used to cast any of his spells in his own magic phase. These re-rolls may prevent a Miscast but cannot cause Irresistible Force. However, if he chooses to use these re-rolls he must test for Stupidity at the start of his next turn, provided that he's not in close combat, as is normal. If he uses more than one of his entitled re-rolls, a negative modifier of -1 per re-roll used will be forced on his Leadership characteristic for his next Stupidity test. For example, if he utilizes all 3 available re-rolls he'll have to test for Stupidity at the start of his next turn with a modifier of -2 to his Leadership. This negative modifier will be discarded if W'soran would normally be safe from the effects of Stupidity at the start of his next turn (such as being involved in a Close Combat).

#### Note:

These rules have been designed and pointed very carefully, and as such we believe they are balanced for normal games.

However as they are custom rules we recommend you obtain your opponent's permission beforehand, as well as showing them these rules.

If you do notice anything drastically wrong or unfair with these rules please feedback to us at the Carpe Noctem

Disciple of Nagash

# Beating the Baiters

Written by Count Flapula

### The Teachings of Abhorash

Hello there, and welcome to a guide to doing something that Vampire Counts (and other Immune to Psychology armies) can't really do like most normal forces: baiting and redirecting the enemy!

That is not to say such tactics can't be used, it's just they're firmly stuck in the "redirection" section of things, as ever since the 7<sup>th</sup> edition book and the removal of living troops in the army, flee-baiting is not possible. For the uninitiated, baiting is the tactic of placing a typically expendable unit in the path of the enemy and then fleeing away when charged. The idea is to have a decent unit placed to counter-charge the exposed enemy unit, ideally in the flank, although sometimes you'll just be grateful to make an enemy fail a charge and waste its movement! The best troops to bait with are fast cavalry and skirmishers; the former because if they flee voluntarily and then rally, they can move and shoot in their next turn as normal. The latter, because by the current charging rules, when you charge a unit of Skirmishers, you must make contact with the closest (reachable!) model, so by placing the closest model right to the side of the unit, if you flee, the path of flight is from the centre the enemy unit to the centre of that closest model which means they can flee at an extreme angle, making it even easier to get the enemy to expose a flank.

So, that's what we can't do... but obviously more importantly, is what we can do!

#### Redirecting

Redirecting is similarly simple, and involves placing a unit right in front of the enemy. Typically Dire Wolves are our best unit for this, as they are cheap, very fast, and can use fast cavalry free reforms to force the enemy to align to them at the angle of our choice, with ease. Raised zombies are just as good for this as well, although they will give up 50VPs, remember. Figure 1 illustrates this simple mechanic:

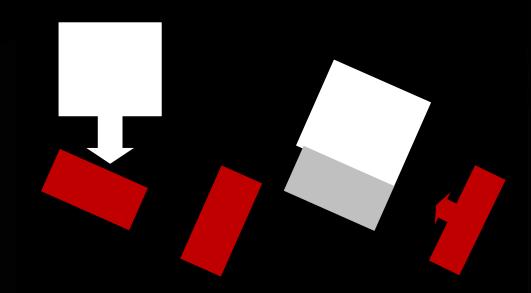


Figure 1: The enemy takes the bait and charges, aligning to the wolves. Next turn after the doggies are dead, the flanking unit can return the favour!

Of course, it's rarely as simple as that in a game of two players! The key is to put your opponent in a position where he's losing out either way. If he charges your redirector then he suffers a flank charge; if he doesn't... then his unit sits there doing nothing for a turn. Of course the easiest enemy to bait like this is a frenzied one, who won't have any choice but to make the charge. Hatred is also something that can be used, as both frenzy and hatred mean that a victorious unit must always pursue/overrun where possible, which can make planning for where to point your counter-charger even easier!

Double the fun

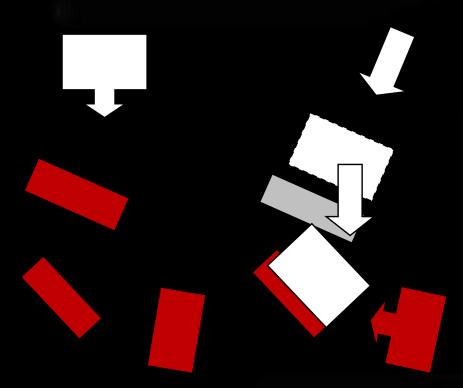
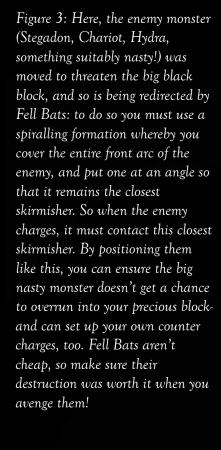


Figure 2: add in a pinch of pursuit into fresh enemy.

Sneakier still is to double up your redirectors. In this case the enemy charges through the first throwaway unit, and is probably congratulating himself on a job well done as he slams into the next unit behind them- which doesn't have to be a redirector, it could be a big ranked unit, or whatever. However, before that combat is fought, you will get a movement phase- and the counter charge should see the smile fall from your opponent's face. As in figure 2, after destroying the first unit, the enemy can stay put for a flank charge, or advance to the next unit, where the cunningly-placed counter unit will actually get his rear- always a joyous thing to see on the tabletop! Remember for cases where both sides count as charging, the combat order is decided solely by initiative order (Well, excepting exceptions such as Always Strikes First)- so if the enemy is speedier than your counter unit, then he will be striking first and could well kill some of your chargers! So try and sneak in a Danse Macabre or similar onto the unit in that case- you don't want to end up losing combat with two units at once...

#### Redirection from Above

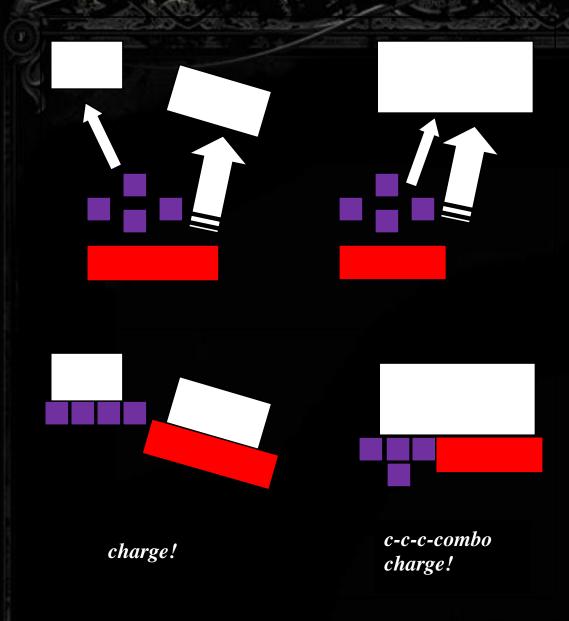
Skirmishers are great for baiting in other armies, but the VC can't typically match other living armies- Fell Bats are on big bases, and Wraiths are just too expensive to run around doing things like this- unless the target is really worthwhile, of course. The big difference between skirmishers and ranked units for redirection is that when the enemy charges a skirmishing unit, it's the skirmishing unit that ranks up and aligns, not the charger: thereby giving them more control over the situation. The key to redirecting with Fell Bats is to put your opponent in an untenable position: either he charges you, and you get to have some control over where he ends up, or he doesn't, and is stuck. Here's an example:



Now, as the enemy usually has better troops to bait with, it's worth also asking how we can stop becoming victims of good enemy baiting and trapping. There's a fair bit of hatred in the Vampire Counts army, and a dash of frenzy, which makes the Knights of Blood Keep one of the easiest things in the game to bait, and an especially expensive and tempting target. Fifteen Strength 7 attacks (plus horses!) don't mean much when you're only hitting enemy hounds or are getting flanked, that's for sure!

The simplest way to screen the Blood Knights from their frenzied charge is to place a friendly unit in front of them. If they can't reach a target, they can't charge it: even if the enemy is clearly less than 14" away. If the charge path is blocked, they will not declare the charge. Of course, this leads to another predicament: what about when you actually WANT to charge with them? You'll have either needed to think a movement ahead, or gotten the screen out the way some other way. The simplest way to do this is to just declare a charge with the screen at the same time!

Or, to put it more correctly, declare the charge with the screen first, and then at the end of the "declare chargers" phase, check if the Blood Knights are within charge ranged: if they are, and their screen is gone, they must declare the charge- even if you hadn't intended it in the first place. This principle can be used for any unit, except that of course, you don't get to measure beforehand if it isn't frenzied.



the right Fell Bat unit declares a charge on the large unit on the right. When it comes to measuring for frenzied charges, both Blood Knight units are in range, so the left unit goes in on the middle enemy unit, and the right unit also gets to declare a charge on the larger unit! As they're both charging the same region, both of these two units are moved at the same time and must both maximise as best they can (and can even sort-of move through each other if it helps the maximisation of the charge). Be careful of combocharging with Dire Wolves as you'll have to get in as many Dire Wolves as you do Blood Knights, which may leave some fierce Vampire attacks wasted.

On the left side, the first Fell Bat unit charges the weak unit on the left, while

In each case, the Blood Knights were left with a tiny sliver of line of sight to the enemy. You can be even more creative with this if there's an enemy on the hill that the screened unit can see, as the enemy may take it for granted if you block your screened unit's conventional line of sight fully, which may allow you to get a charge on the unit on the hill that they just didn't see coming.

Another way of getting the Blood Knights where you want them is good old fashioned Vampire Counts magic: move the screen away in the movement phase, move Blood Knights into position, cast Vanhel's Danse on the Blood Knights and away you go. But if you don't get the spell off, your unit could be well out of position in the next turn!

Figure 4: Double Blood Knight charges!

#### Counter-baiting

One thing that many people fail to take into account when baiting with a small unit, is that you don't have to charge it with just one thing: and indeed, if you do charge the bait with a second, larger unit that is positioned off to the side, this will change the direction that the baiting unit flees from and can ruin the sneaky cowards' day! In addition a second unit charging the baiting unit may also result in it fleeing, in which case you may be able to charge a different unit instead.

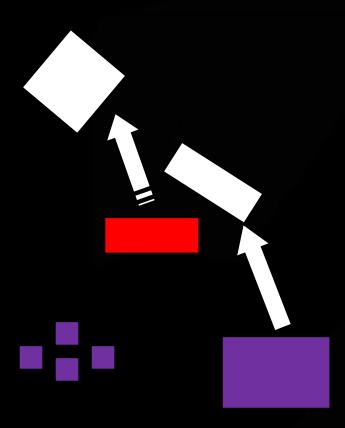


Figure 5: counterattack!

In figure 5 the enemy has foolishly placed his fast cavalry to pull the Blood Knights away to the right, not thinking that the 20 Zombies who have been holding back might also declare the charge! The Blood Knights can then declare the charge on the more important block that was protected and prepared to counter charge, so the fast cavalry had better not flee. Even if the cavalry holds, it spells doom for the enemy, as the Blood Knights can declare enemy in the way on the enemy in the way, and hit them as well as the Zombies

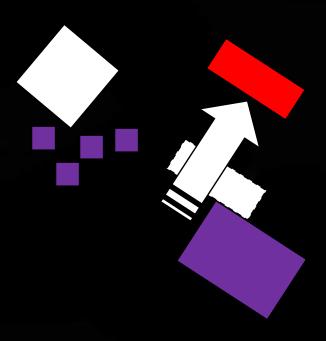


Figure 6: a safe victory!

So the Blood Knights storm through their weak enemy; good thing whoever drew this diagram was paying attention earlier and moved up the Fell Bats into a position to draw the enemy block away!

Other tricks and tips

Sometimes you know that the bait just isn't good enough and your opponent won't fall for your tricks - damn their still-beating hearts! On these occasions, you can simply leave your Dire Wolves or Zombie screens in front of the enemy, not blocking them fully, but taking advantage of the mighty 1" rule.

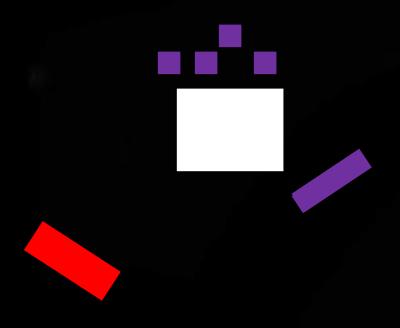


Figure 7: exploiting the 1-inch rule.

Here, the mighty Zombies have been raised at the very corner of the enemy block. He doesn't want to charge, for a start it'll be a nightmare just aligning the units properly! That, and he can see the Blood Knights waiting to pounce if he does. However, when it gets to the remaining

moves phase, he finds the unit can't move forwards at all, as any move will bring it within 1" of the Zombies, which is not allowed. And so he is stuck there and 5 little Zombies are determining his entire forward movement. Do note, mind you, that this 1" rule doesn't apply during charges, so if he were to declare a charge and can make it around the Zombies to the target, the charge is valid! And then just to really restrict him and let him know who's in charge, some Fell Bats have dumped themselves immediately behind the unit, so he can't even scoot a couple of inches away from the Blood Knights. Evil!

Screening Blood Knights at the like does have disadvantages and counters, however. Take this situation, with enemy Chaos Knights of Khorne (Coloured with Blood Angels Orange here, of course) and the Blood Knights facing off against each other:

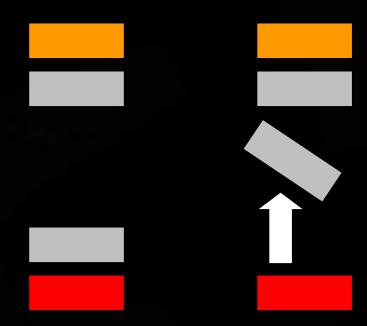


Figure 8: So simple I didn't realise this would work until it happened to me!

In figure 8 both players have cunningly screened their Knights with a simple unit of doggies. However, if you can get a unit in the way of the screening unit, then they're out of luck! So just hurl your own unit of Dire Wolves up into the path of the screening unit and that's that: unless they charge, they're going nowhere that turn, and neither is the unit they're screening. One thing to remember about screening units is they're usually very weak, and may not be able to wipe out a simple unit of Dire Wolves in one charge. If you can just keep your redirecting unit on their screen until the enemy's next turn, then they've wasted a third of the game just sitting there with nowhere to go.

However, eventually, even the best players will end up having to charge something that isn't especially favourable. What separates the better players is mitigating these effects. Here's a couple of ways to do so:

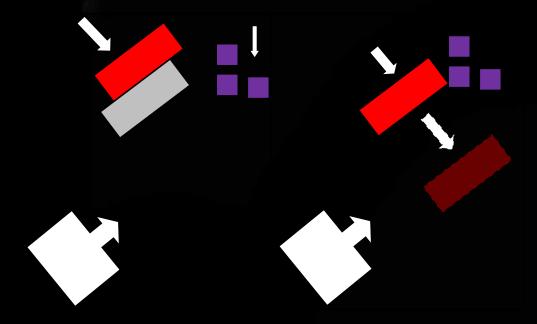


Figure 9: we're not going anywhere!

In figure 9, the enemy has successfully baited the Blood Knights with his fast cavalry, with a big block of infantry just waiting to smash them with a flank charge after the overrun. The first thing to remember here is you have some control over your alignment, so if the enemy counter charger is to the left flank, then align on the right side! Even with a little overhang, every model from both units is fighting, so this still counts as maximising. The second thing done to avoid the nasty flank charge is by moving the Fell Bats so they're just in front of the Blood Knights: this means that after the overrun, the Knights will move into the Fell Bats, just clipping their bases, and as a result the movement stops. So while the enemy was expecting the Blood Knights to be in the lower position, the overrun stops early, and the Blood Knights are saved! A further benefit here is that the Knights are even screened for the next turn.

Remember this kind of thing doesn't apply exclusively to Blood Knights-you can use the same concepts to stop units overrunning too far from your battle line after a successful charge for example. Raised Zombies are good for this as well, and if they save you a turn of extra manoeuvring, then that's another turn killing you'll get with them!

One other thing to remember is to give your own baiting and redirecting a bit of leeway: while it can be cool to play the game down to the last millimetre of precision, you never know when something's going to get in the way and mess up such precision. One thing that people will commonly do to a scary enemy unit of Knights is place a unit to redirect along an extreme angle at the side, but then also target that unit with shooting or magic. This can mean that it suffers one or more casualties, and hey presto, after taking the casualties off (evenly from either end), the unit can all of a sudden wheel around past the redirecting unit. Whoops!!

As ever, this game is usually won in the movement phase. Simple small units of Dire Wolves and Fell Bats can help provide you with the movement advantages to dictate where everything ends up, and which units fight the enemy, and on whose terms. Don't be afraid to throw away these units if they can help sway the tide in your favour!



# The Golden Bat Painting Competition Winter 2010

Winning Entry - Vlad von Carstein by Redarmy27



### Second Place - Wight King by Yahoo



Well as you can no doubt see from the pictures, the Golden Bat Painting Competition Winter 2010 (which I apologise to my members for getting 2009 & 2010 mixed up all the time – DoN) was a fantastic success.

Not only did we have more entries than any of the previous competitions, there were more votes for what turned out to be a very close run race. Indeed for the first few days it didn't seem that Yahoo was going to get second place, in fact the second place at that point (Beeblicon), looked to be possibly going to knock Redarmy27 off first place.

The competition was a great example of Carpe Noctem's friendly spirit, with everyone commenting, giving advice and generally having fun.

It was also our first competition to have actual prizes, and a big thanks to our sponsors OG Games for providing the winning vouchers.

As well as being a fun-filled competition, the Golden Bat has been a learning process and as such there will be some changes in the future, including the introduction of a third place position (complete with medal), and other categories for members who prefer not to paint!

So congratulations to Redarmy27 on his well-deserved first place (you can find out how Redarmy27 did his blood effects elsewhere in this issue – DoN), and Yahoo on his second place, second time around!

Of course we can't forget everyone else who entered. All the entries were superb, and all of them are models that their owners should be proud of. You can view the rest of the entries on the next page.

If you are interested in entering the next Golden Bat Painting Competition, then make sure to read the June issue of the Invocation, which will have all the updated criteria, prizes and how to enter.







Corneroftheattic



Capt Rubber Ducky



Dougan\_2



Hosko



Iceman



Illusionarypresence



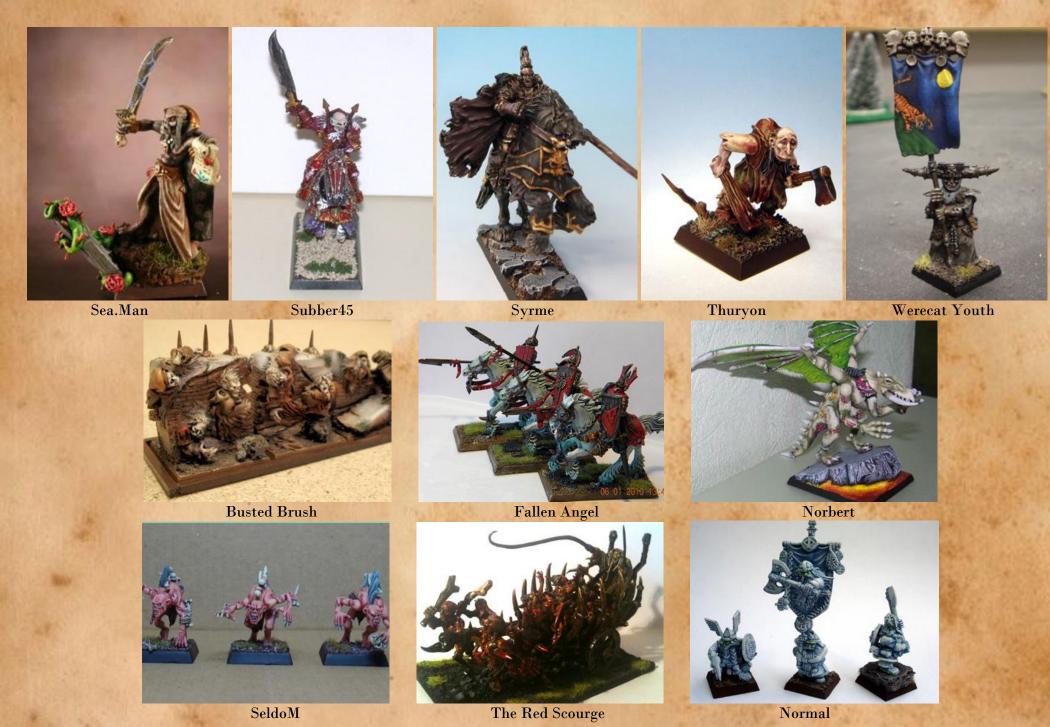
Johnjohn2



Macho Castigador



Nechranium



## Army Theming

Written by Johnny B

Themed armies have always been one of the best parts of Warhammer for me; nothing is quite as cool as a strongly themed and characterful army with a strong sense of narrative. Well, nothing in Warhammer at least. In this article I'd like to take a look at some of the ways in which Vampire Counts armies can be themed, and how best to go about it.

In my experience, Vampire Counts are prone to looking a little bland next to more 'showy' armies with large, flashy centrepieces or massed ranks of shiny troops bearing ornate banners; our small-to-medium sized starting units and 'bitty' army structure can look uninspiring at a glance. A strong theme can be an excellent way to get around this, not to mention it generally stifles the moans of 'cheese', which we attract so very easily from players who simply refuse to learn how to combat undead.

Most armies in Warhammer already have a certain background imprint upon them; armies like High Elves, Lizardmen, Dwarfs, all have pretty strong ties to certain areas and ideas in the Warhammer world.

Some armies, however, are much more malleable when it comes to theming, the Vampire Counts being one of these. Undead can be from anywhere, vampires can exist at any level of society and the mix of characters and units in an undead army can tell a wide variety of stories.

The focus of any Vampire Counts army is the general, both in terms of gaming and in terms of fluff. As it is his personality that reanimates and drives the army, it is his character that should be reflected in the theme. The old Bloodlines are an obvious way to engage with this, and are a good starting point, as is the fluff for some of our magic items. Some possible vampire characters:

- A Bretonnian aristocrat, with a Bretonnia-themed list.
- A Strigoi with his Ghoul minions.
- A great necromancer, perhaps a Necrarch.

These easily fit into Warhammer, but they are merely starting points. Now, before we go crazy building and painting, why not try pushing the theme further and adding narrative?

A Bretonnian aristocrat, not just any Duke but the disembodied spirit of Maldred of Moussillon, struck down by the Red Pox. An ethereal Vampire Lord, with his Lady Malfleur as a Banshee, leading an army of plague-ridden zombies and reanimated skeletons. Your corpse carts could be plague carts, your skeletons converted from Men at Arms, your Black Knights converted from plastic Bretonnian knights. Your Black Coach could be the Duke's hearse, which carried him to his final, uneasy resting place. Your zombies could all bear the red blotches of the plague. The Lord's retinue of Wraiths could be the ghostly guests from his final ball, complete with masks and finery. The Red Pox himself could appear, with his scythe and all, maybe he could be the general and Maldred could be an ethereal thrall? Check the old VCs army book for the Red Pox fluff.

Strigoi, mighty predator reigning over his hapless victims by night; an unstoppable monster. Or is he? Perhaps he has become the hunted, a pitiful creature who must rely on his Strigani to shelter him and keep him safe. Perhaps the best place to hide is in plain sight - a carnival, a showcase of hideous freaks and abominations that tours the empire putting on shows. Creepy caravans (corpse cart, Black Coach), misshapen freaks (Ghouls), exotic animals from the four corners of the world (Dire Wolves, Fell Bats, Varghulf) a strong man (Vampire Thrall/Wight King) and a sinister ringmaster with long fingers and hairy palms... Some of the Mordheim Carnival of Chaos miniatures may be suitable for such a theme.

A great Necromancer, perhaps even the 'most depraved man who ever lived'; Har'ak Iman and his host of Arabian Undead. He bears the Cursed Book, written by his own evil hand. He could be accompanied by his unliving, dagger-wielding, turban-wearing Hashshashin (Ghouls), a vampire riding a flying carpet (Flying Horror) and even a Djinn (Varghulf). My friend Mike has done this very concept, it's on the Warhammer forum, here:

The Arabian army of Har'ak Iman

Al Muktar's Desert Dogs and the DoW paymaster are the obvious start point for this army, and perhaps the easterlings from LoTR.

The key to a good theme is to make sure it carries through across the entire army. If you use Bretonnians to convert your undead, limit yourself to Bretonnian figures throughout the army to keep the look of the army consistent. Similarly, if you decide to incorporate certain iconography on your Grave Guard banners and shields, keeping the same themes going on all the banners and shields in your army will keep it coherent; you can also denote various units' status by varying the complexity of the design. Taking this concept further, your general could have a visually strong Coat of Arms, which could then be repeated upon his retinue of undead knights but with subtle variations; if the general's heraldry incorporates two dragons and a chalice, perhaps his retainers have heraldry bearing parts of this (so maybe a single dragon and a chalice, two dragons and no chalice, etc).

My own Nippon-themed vampires came from my love of Samurai history, particularly from reading about the warlord Oda Nobunaga; tyrant, genius, madman, he is one of the most colourful characters of Japan's history, and is often portrayed as an evil villain or sorcerer. He was betrayed by one of his generals and perished in a burning temple, but his body was never found: many popular culture stories depict him surviving the incident or returning from the grave and this became the start point for my army.

There are so many options; Vampires from Kislev leading their undying Lancers and bear Varghulfs, a Cathayan vampire (perhaps a thrall of the immortal Dragon Emperor, said to be a vampire) leading his terracotta Grave Guard, a vampire pirate captain with his zombie pirates and hideous Kraken, Valnir the Reaper leading his Crow Tribe of Marauders (another 5<sup>th</sup> ed favourite), the list goes on. The most important part of theming is, of course, to have fun and make a cool army with a sense of character that goes beyond the usual buy-paint-play hobbying.

You can see Johnny B's samurai themed army elsewhere in this issue – Disciple of Nagash

# The Necrarch's Experiments....

Written by Swissdictator

### Themed Army Lists

In this issue I will be writing a guide to creating an army with a Necrarch feel to it. Like my previous guides, this is intended to be a themed list that is completely legal using the existing army book. That way you have a "Necrarch list" without having to need your opponent's permission.

Vampiric powers are no longer restricted by blood line, so it should be defined what fits the Necrarchs. Some of these powers might clearly be Necrarch, while others allowed may be chosen as they are compatible with the background of the Necrarchs.

The Necrarchs are known for their powerful magic, and ability to raise hordes of undead. They are inquisitive, devoting themselves to the study of the arcane and (un)death. They are perhaps a twisted dark mirror-image of mortals who devote themselves to science, life, and healing. They are loners and tend to not fare well in combat, preferring their undead servants to do the fighting for them. They are often seen as ugly, wretched and horrific as they have no care about maintaining a pleasant appearance.

The Necrarchs are isolated from the world at large, even from their own dark kin. From the blood line powers under "The Severed", they may choose "Supernatural Horror", for they often look like decayed and wretched creatures. They may not choose "Ghoulkin", for that is the realm of the Strigoi.

The Necrarchs are the very definition of "The Arkayne" when it comes to vampires. All powers lister under "The Arkayne" may be selected by a Necrarch vampire. Furthermore, they may select "Lord of the Dead" due to their skilled Necromancy. They may not choose "Summon Ghouls", for that is the nature of the Strigoi, not the Necrarch. A vampire lord, but not a hero level vampire, may choose "Summon Creatues of the Night" as only the more ancient of the Necrarchs will have expanded their mastery of the dark arts to envelop such creatures.

The Necrarchs are not known for their personal brutality in combat, nor are they known as beasts. None of the powers listed under "The Martialle" or "The Bestialle" may be taken. Such masters of death know how to inspire fear, terror, and drain the will of those who stand before them. As such, they may take "Aura of

Dark Majesty". However they make not take the other powers listed under "The Courtly."

When it comes to items, the Necrarchs tend to shun items used for close combat and embrace those that enhance their magical abilities. The only magic weapons that these vampires (lord or hero) may take are the "Blood Drinker", "Tomb Blade", and the "Biting Blade" magic weapons. Vampires, again lord or hero, are also restricted to only choosing "The Accursed Armor" and the "Nightshroud" for armor. Wight Kings and Necromancers may take weapons and armor as normally allowed.

The "Talisman of the Lycni" may not be taken, but all other Enchanted Items are available. The only Talisman banned is "The Carstein Ring", for obvious reasons. The only Arcane item banned is the "Crimson Gem of Lahmia", also for obvious reasons. Among the magic standards "The Drakenhof Banner", "Flag of Blood Keep", and the "Royal Standard of Strigos" are also prohibited for they belong to other blood lines.

For unit choices they have the following restrictions and requirements. Only one Wight

King may be taken per Vampire Lord. This essentially represents the raising of a bodyguard. It is not required to take a Necromancer, due to isolated nature of the Necrarchs, however in larger games it is recommended to take one (in very large games) a few representing the occasional student that is adopted. However in typical games (2,000 points – 2,250) an actual requirement for a Necromancer might be too restrictive.

For the core choices Zombies and Skeletons count for core requirements, while Ghouls do not. You may not have more Ghouls than Skeletons. The restrictions on special and rare choices are that only one Fell Bat unit may be taken per Vampire Lord, while Blood Knights and the Black Coach are prohibited. In addition you may not have more Grave Guard or Black Knights *in unit strength* than zombies and skeletons (combined). This is done to help keep their distinct horde feel intact.

Modeling and appearance "Dos" would be that your Vampires should look old and aged, or decrepit in some other sense of the word. The plastic kit for Empire Wizards works well for this, as do the old Necrarch figures. Your starting force should look completely raised, but having figures for raising purposes that are coming out of the grave does fit this blood line. Even better would be for a display board to show the rising dead as well!

Ordering the coffin lids for use as shields may be advised. Also, converting your Zombies and/or Skeletons to look like they've been raised from all over the world could be very interesting. Having Elven, Imperial, Bretonnian, etc. Zombies can go a long way towards showing that it was an army raised from abroad. Alternately, having some undead from another race might be fun when raising Zombies or Skeletons and using those of the army you face. While this might be a bit costly, it should prove fun to be a lot of fun.



Picture by Ophidicus

### Sample Army List:

Vampire Lord

~ Level upgrade.

~Dark Acolyte, Master of the Black Arts, ~Lord of the Dead

~Blood Drinker, Sceptre de Noirot, Dispel

~Scroll

Vampire

~ Dark Acolyte, Lord of Dead

~Book of Arkhan, Talisman of Protection

Vampire

~ Dark Acolyte, Lord of Dead

~Tomb Blade, Dispel Scroll

30 Zombies

30 Zombies

30 Zombies

25 Skeletons

 $\tilde{FC}$ 

25 Skeletons

 $^{\sim}$  FC

25 Skeletons

 $^{\sim}FC$ 

3 Spirit Hosts

3 Spirit Hosts

# Army Showcase

Samurai Vampire Counts army by Johnny B

Following on from Johnny B's article I thought it would be an ideal time to showcase one of the most impressive converted armies I have ever seen, also from Johnny B. With some models that are entirely built from scratch from green stuff, to some sublime kit bashing, this army is a sight to behold. Enjoy!

Disciple of Nagash

### Vampire Lord







## Necromancer and Vampire Battle Standard Bearer











### Zombies











## Grave Guard











## Ghouls









## Black Knights









## Dire Wolves







## Wraiths









## Varghulf











New Slayer Brotherhood
http://z8.invisionfree.com/SlayerBrotherhood/
Warhammer Fantasy Battle Reporter
http://battlereporter.freeforums.org/portal.php

Gurrent and back issues available at http://issuu.com/thedoomseeker/docshttp://www.4shared.com/dir/29941410/23ea5bcf/sharing.html

The webzine for players who believe in playing the game for fun.

## Carpe Noctem Needs You!!

Article Submissions

Calling all lovers of the dark and macabre!

Carpe Noctem is looking for more people to contribute to the ever successful e-zine The Invocation.

Articles can be on any aspect of Vampire Counts, whether it is building your very own zombie dragon, or how to fight those pesky Skayen.



We also need more artists! Whilst we have some superb artists currently contributing, the amount of workload is rather hard on them, so any and all pieces would be very welcome.

Please note that the The Invocation works in an A4 landscape format, so all articles should be written / designed with that in mind.

If you would like to join the Invocation staff, and earn the highly sought after Invocation silver and gold medals, then please contact Disciple of Nagash at Carpe Noctem via PM.

For ease of reference here is a quick link:

Disciple of Nagash

## Blood on a Budget

Written by Malisteen

So, you've decided to collect a Vampire Counts army? Whether beguiled by the stylish models, entranced by the compelling fluff, or intrigued by the unique game mechanics, you've been left with the following questions: What next? What do you buy first? Is there anything special you should know about assembling and painting a Vamp Counts army that is different from any other army? And how can you get your force together without breaking the bank?

Blood on a Budget answers these questions by following a new Vampire Counts player, namely myself, as I collect an army on a limited budget. Along the way there's something useful for anyone, from tips on avoiding problems with ghouls to instructions on getting the most out of your corpse cart model. Along the way you'll learn how to duplicate my successes and avoid my failures.

Each issue I'll have budget of \$60 in US currency, with an extra \$100 in this first article to get the army started. If I manage to stay under budget, the difference is added to next month's allowance. By the end of the article I'll have selected my purchases, assembled and painted the new additions, and played a game, complete with battle report. Finally I'll conclude with what I've learned and some thoughts on what I might add next time.

Overhead: My budget only covers costs unique to collecting Vampire Counts, and doesn't cover general costs like Core Rules and Hobby Supplies. If you're new to Warhammer altogether, you can expect these items to represent a significant cost on their own. The core rulebook is \$50, as is GW's 'Hobby Starter Set', which will cover your basic tools and paints. You'll probably also end up picking some spray primer, extra sand and glue before you're done, as well as some paint post for colors you want that the starter set doesn't include. In the end, these costs will probably spend almost \$150 on these initial paint and supply purchases, though the costs of replacing them as you use them should prove to be much lower.

The choice of Vampire is a very personal one. The fluff presents us with a range of very different styles, and the rules support a similar range of configurations, whether focused on arcane might, martial skill, or something in between. The best deal for the money is the 6th edition blisters with both a mounted and on foot vampire together for \$20. These are direct-only models, though, so you might have to order them from Games Workshop yourself if your local hobby store doesn't have them in stock.

The Value of Retail: I'm paying retail value for the models I select, because I'm buying them from the local brick and mortar. If your budget is especially tight, or if you don't have a local hobby or gaming store, you can frequently find discounts of 10% or more online. Used armies can sometimes be found at eBay for mere fractions of their retail cost. However, if you do have a local gaming store, remember that it provides a place for you to meet, socialize, and play with fellow gamers. They also introduce new players to the game, keeping the hobby alive. So if your models cost a bit more there, remember all the extra benefits that the store provides you before taking your business to the web.

While those blisters are the best deal for the money, your Vampire is the heart of your army. It's very important that you like the look and style of your vampire, so you shouldn't feel bad lavishing some extra attention on it, whether that's extra care with painting or extra funds from your budget. So get the Vampire model that you like the most! I myself like the style of the newer, 7th edition vampires, so I picked up the Aristocratic Vampire for \$15.

The initial infantry is probably an easier choice. The Vampire Counts Battalion Box is a great deal, at least in US currency. \$90 for more than \$100 worth of infantry, plus a corpse cart as well. Every vampire player will want some zombies, if for no other reason than to cast *Raise Dead*. If you know you don't want the corpse cart, and you know you only want skeletons or ghouls and not both, then you might skip it, but since I haven't yet decided which infantry units I like, it was an easy choice for me.

That left me with \$30 of my original budget, and since I really wanted to give each of the core infantry units a fair shot, I picked up another box of ghouls, rounding the unit out to 20. That brought my total expenditure up to \$152, with \$8 left over to spend next month.

#### **Basic Assembly**

There are some basic rules to assembling models that you've probably heard elsewhere. Use needle files & hobby knives to trim the mold lines off your models before assembling them. Use plastic glue for plastic to plastic bonds, and super glue for everything else. This advice is important for any army, but is especially important for Vampire Counts. Our models favor fast painting techniques like overbrushes, drybrushes, and washes. While these techniques allow your army to be painted quickly, they also cause mold lines to stand out all the more clearly. Where you might get away in other armies with assembling the models first and then trimming visible mold lines, the gaunt, hunched

over undead models make this far more difficult. So the basic cleaning techniques are especially important with vampire counts. Don't be lazy!

There are also a few problems specific to Vampire Counts which you might not at first anticipate. The first is that a lot of the new vampire counts infantry models lean noticeably forward, while the hero models mostly do not. If you're not careful, this can result in hero models that don't rank up in your units! The solution to this is simple, but requires a touch of forethought. Assemble your heroes first, and then nominate a 'second' in each of your units for each hero that might join them. This second will stand behind the hero in the second rank. Assemble that model with your hero on hand and make sure that your hero always ranks up with it.



My vampire with her 'Second' from the ghoul unit. Assembling a second in each of your units for each of your heroes will avoid problems ranking up your models later.

The next thing to watch out for is Ghouls. These guys just don't like to rank up at all! When I first assembled my ghouls I didn't pay attention to this, and as a result, they just couldn't rank up nicely. I had to cut them off of their bases and re-glue them, damaging their little feet in the process!



My ghouls' poor damaged feet!

But you can avoid this problem altogether. Don't glue your ghouls to their bases until they're fully assembled, and then glue them to their bases one at a time, making sure they rank up as you do so. Don't forget to put your heroes' "seconds" in the second rank!

After you finish gluing your models to their bases, you'll need to number the bottoms of their bases so you can put them back in the same order on the tabletop.



Rank up your ghouls' bases and glue the assembled models to them one at a time, to make sure the rank up.



When you're finished, number the bottom of the bases so you can put them in the same order later.

With zombies, you'll find that the sprues come with all sorts of extra bits - arms, heads, tombstones, and the 'hanged man' bit - intended to go on a zombie standard - all of which can be used to model extra zombies, especially if you

have them digging up out of the ground. I was able to model five extra zombies myself, even while trading many of their bits away to another player for some spare Empire bits, as well as the spare bases to put these extra zombies on.

Another note on zombies - The scythe bit can be difficult to rank up, and also looks like a potentially useful bit for future conversions, so I didn't use any in my zombie unit, instead saving them for later.



Five zombies bursting from the earth, made with spare bases and extra pieces from the zombie sprue.



Small fishing weights can be used to balance top-heavy models.

For the most part, the skeletons shouldn't give you any trouble. Their skinny limbs are fragile, and you'll want to paint the shields separately from the models before gluing them on, but they're otherwise easy to work with. Their lockstep marching pose makes them easy to rank up, so long as you remember to designate a second for each of your heroes who might join them. The standard bearer might be top heavy and prone to tipping, however. To fix this, you'll want to weight the bottom of the bases. I use small size removable split-shot fishing weights, cut in half and glued to the underside of the base. Be careful to wash your hands after handling them, as these weights typically include lead.

Bits Trading: One of the advantages of frequenting a local hobby store and getting to know the gaming community there is the opportunity to trade bits, and Vamp Counts sprues have a number of bits that many players would be happy to trade for, including tombstones and skulls. I was able to trade some spare zombie and skeleton bits for several spare 20mm bases as well as a couple unused Empire wizard bits, which helped supply some of the pieces for my conversions.

#### Advanced Assembly & conversions

The corpse cart has some interesting options – a lodestone or balefire, necromancer or none. While assembling a Corpse Cart is already quite a task, a little extra hobby work can help you get the most out of your model by letting you change its configuration from game to game.

The first thing is the Corpse Cart's basic assembly. Take your time, trim the mold lines as you go, be careful to make sure you put the zombie pullers in the right order, fit each piece before gluing. I recommend using small dabs of superglue to assemble the model rather than plastic glue, so that you can break pieces apart if they don't fit right.

Don't glue the rider, bell or balefire in place. There are some ropes that attach to the back of the cart, and you'll want to leave them off as well, for now. Don't glue the model to the base. This will make it easier to paint the cart's underside, as well as the base itself.

We're going to make the rider a necromancer. The corpse cart rider already makes an excellent necromancer, but because you'll want to be able to field him on foot, the spear and whip are too long for him to hold. The easiest thing to do is to cut the whip down to about a centimeter and then sharpen it to make a wand of bone. I did a bits swap to use one of the empire wizard bits I got in a trade, myself.



Here's what we'll be building - a Corpse Cart with a removable rider and swappable lodestone/balefire.

Either way, the necromancer will need to be able to go on the cart or on foot, and for that you'll need an extra 20mm square base. The model is 'stepping up' on the cart, so you'll also need some extra basing material for the model to be stepping up on when on foot. I used some bits of cork board, but you could use a bit of green stuff, or a spare skull, or anything else that you can drill through. You'll also need a pin vise and some brass wire of the same width as the drill bit you're using.

Drill up into the rider's feet and glue some short lengths of pinning wire into them. The raised foot will need a longer piece of wire - the two pins need to be parallel, and need to end at the same height. Carefully note where the pins will meet the corpse cart, and drill matching holes through the cart. I misaligned my initial holes, and had to drill new ones, using green stuff to fix the mistake.

For the square base, glue down whatever the necromancer's going to be stepping on, and when that's dry carefully align your models and drill the matching holes there as well. Finally glue on the rope bits that you left off before.



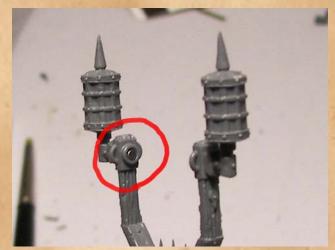
The Necromancer with Pins and 20mm base



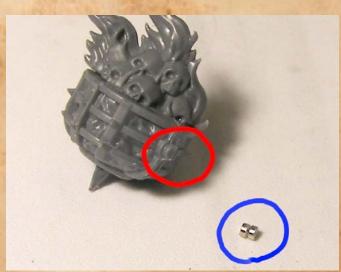
Holes drilled into the cart for the rider's pins to fit

With that done, we turn to the bell & balefire. This step can be done with short pins as with the necromancer, but I used magnets - specifically "rare earth 1/16th inch diameter disk magnets" that you can find online with a Google search. Find the little rings on the poles on the back of cart where the bell or balefire attaches. Glue one magnet into each of the rings, making sure the same polarity points in on both sides.

Now take your assembled balefire and lodestone. Cut off the tabs that would normally fit into the rings on the Corpse Cart poles, then glue a magnet onto where the each tab was, making sure that the correct side is exposed so that the pieces will stick in place rather than be pushed away from each other.



This picture shows where to glue the magnets onto the Corpse Cart's poles



The red circle shows the tab you need to remove; the blue circle shows the magnets that you'll replace it with.



Here's the final bit with the magnet in place of the old tab. Be careful to make sure the polarities of the magnets are correct!

#### Painting

Before painting, it's important to wash all your models with warm water, especially the metal ones. Residues can be left on the model from the molding process, and oils from your skin can get on the models as you clean and assemble them. All of this can result in poor paint adhesion and chipping, so a little extra care before painting can save a lot of hassle later on.

It's also important to consider your basing method before painting. If you're going to glue flock or sand to painted bases and leave it as such, then you won't need to do anything before painting. But if you paint the sand on your bases like I do, then you'll probably want to glue that sand on before priming.

This is best done all at once, using watered down tacky hobby glue or PVA glue, painted to the base before dipping in your sand. Use an old brush that you don't care about too much for this - it will never be the same afterwards. Priming your models is also important, and there's a trick I picked up from White Dwarf that makes priming your models much faster & easier. Pick up a cheap piece of wood, about three feet or so long and an inch & a half or so on a side. Wrap the wood in 2 sided tape (I use carpet tape), and stick all your infantry to it. Then you can spray prime the models all at once on the stick, easily reaching all the tricky angles. The same trick can be used for matte spray varnish, such as GW's Purity Seal.



The priming stick, in all its glory!



The stick allows you to prime many models at once.

Once your models are primed, it's time to get started. Painting an army can be a daunting task. So much work to do! Redarmy27 and The Dark Sheep have written some great painting guides for the Invocation, but trying to paint an entire army up to those standards can just overwhelming. Still, there are some tricks and techniques that make painting good looking undead models easier.

Tricks of the Trade: The main techniques you'll want to learn to get good looking models quickly are overbrushing, drybrushing, and washing. While I could try to explain these techniques to you, I'd have a hard time doing better than GW did in White Dwarf. You can read these articles for free online, although you will have to sign into the games workshop web page. Just follow THISLINK!

Using these techniques, I was able to paint up my infantry pretty quickly. I recommend that you paint all your infantry, then all your cavalry, monsters, and other fancier models, and then all your heroes. If you can get into the zone, then you can bust the units out pretty quickly, and it's satisfying when done with a step to know you won't have to do that step again at all.

All my infantry and the corpse cart used the same painting methods. First up is the skin, which I painted with Dheneb Stone - slightly watered down, and in two coats where necessary, as per The Dark Sheep's Zombie Painting Guide from Invocation #2. Once the skin was painted I washed it - with Thraka Green for zombies and Baal Red for ghouls. After that I hit the skin with an overbrush of Dheneb stone. The necromancer's skin was left unwashed.



Undead skin tones, using Dheneb Stone & colored washes.

Bone Areas - including teeth and claws -were painted next. First I applied an overbrush of Khemri Brown, followed by another overbrush of Dheneb Stone. Using the same color for the highlight helped tie the army together visually. Even if the skeletons are bone, the zombies a sickly green, and the ghouls a ruddy red, they all still have the same overall tone.



Bone sections, using Khemri Brown and Dheneb Stone.

After that were brown sections - wood, light hair, cloth, and even the bases. All of these were painted with Chordite Granite. Brown highlights were also applied with overbrushes - Iyanden Yellow for light hair, graveyard earth for wood, Calthan Brown for cloth and leather.



Brown sections, with a single base coat and different overbrushes.

Metal areas were base coated in Tin Bitz and then overbrushed with Chainmail, while black areas, mostly black hair, were painted Chaos Black and overbrushed with Adeptus Battlegrey.



Metal and Black Sections were also highlighted with overbrushes.

Red Areas, including gore, blood on some of the weapons, and red cloth and shields, were Base Coated Mechite Red and then overbrushed with Blood Red.



Red sections, painted with Mechrite Red and Blood Red.

At this point, the entire model was washed with Devlan Mud. All the colors used so far, the skin tones, the bone and metal and even the red, look good with a mud wash to bring out detail, shade everything, and bring it all into the same tones.



A wash of Devlan mud bring everything together.

The mud wash will make things darker, and I ended up drybrushing the bone areas with another layer of Dheneb Stone afterwords. I also painted the eyes with dots of skull white, another idea stolen from Dark Sheep's zombie guide.



Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes!

The bases also need to be painted. I started with a base coat of Chordite Granite. Then I applied an overbrush of Khemri Brown. Stones were painted Adeptus Battlegrey and highlighted with an overbrush of Astronomicon Grey. Finally I glued on patches of static grass, using hobby tacky glue.

At this point, the models are ready for matte spray varnish, another use for the priming stick! Finally, after the matte sealer was dry, I painted 'Ardcoat Gloss Varnish over the blood & gore bits, so they would stand out from the sections that were just painted red.



Nice bases don't take much work, but can make all the difference.



The finished models. Simple painting methods can go a long way.

Now, obviously that's a lot of steps, although using fast painting methods like drybrushes and washes instead of hand painted highlights and wet blending helped. This shows you the kind of quality you can get using only basic techniques that are fast to use and easy to learn. You can speed things up by cutting out some of those steps. Skeletons can get pretty far with just

overbrushes of Dheneb Stone and Chainmail followed by a Devlan Mud wash.

I spent a lot more time on the vampire. Again, the vampire is the heart of your army, and it's not only OK but is actually quite appropriate for your vampire to stick out amid the rest of your army. Notably, my Vampire did not get an allover wash of Devlan Mud. Only specific sections, including the metal, bone, and red areas, received the wash. Redarmy27's blending guide was very useful, showing me how to highlight her red dress and pale skin. Because I had already finished painting the entire rest of the army, I felt free to give the Vampire the attention it deserved!

For the vampire's pale blue skin, I base coated her with Astronomicon Grey before washing her with Asurmen Blue. Then I highlighted her with Astronomicon Grey and finally Skull White.

Her red dress was painted in Mechite Red and highlighted with Blood Red and Blazing Orange before being washed with Devlan Mud. After the mud wash it was highlighted with blood red and Blazing Orange again, before a final wash of Baal Red.

The bone, metal, and black areas were painted as with the infantry, although they were highlighted by hand instead of overbrushed. The black areas did not get a mud wash, and the metal areas received highlights of Chainmail and Mithril Silver after the wash



Your Vampire deserves some extra effort.

The vine was painted Dark Angels Green and highlighted with Snot Green before getting a wash of Thraka Green. The blue roses were base coated with Necron Abyss and Highlighted with Ultramarines blue. Instead of white, the eyes were painted blazing orange and then sunburst yellow, using a very tiny brush.

#### Gaming

So I finally have a painted army! A small one, perhaps, but it's got infantry, a corpse cart, and heroes, and it looks pretty nice! But how does it play? Putting everything together, I came up with the following list:

#### Blood on a Budget, 850 points

- Vampire: Dark Acolyte, Avatar of Death (great weapon)

Flayed Hauberk, Black Periapt

- Necromancer, Extra Spell, Book of Arkhan mounted on Corpse Cart with Balefire
- 20 Skeletons, full command, War Banner
- 20 Crypt Ghouls, Crypt Ghast
- 20 Zombies

This list lets me try out all the options I have so far, including a unit each of the three core filling infantry types, and leaves me with five extra zombies to summon with *Raise Dead*. It has 5 Power Dice and two bound spells for magical offense, and four dispel dice and Balefire on defense, and the Periapt to shift from magical offense to defense as necessary. The vampire also provides some combat punch, with a great weapon and a 2+ save. With this I should be able to start getting a feel for the Counts, and for what I want next.

So how have I done so far? Well, truth be told, not so well. Warhammer Fantasy can be a tricky game, and Vampire Counts are a particularly unique army, and I'm still getting the hang of both! I've been beaten by Dwarves, Empire and Orcs & Goblins, frequently due to my own mistakes.

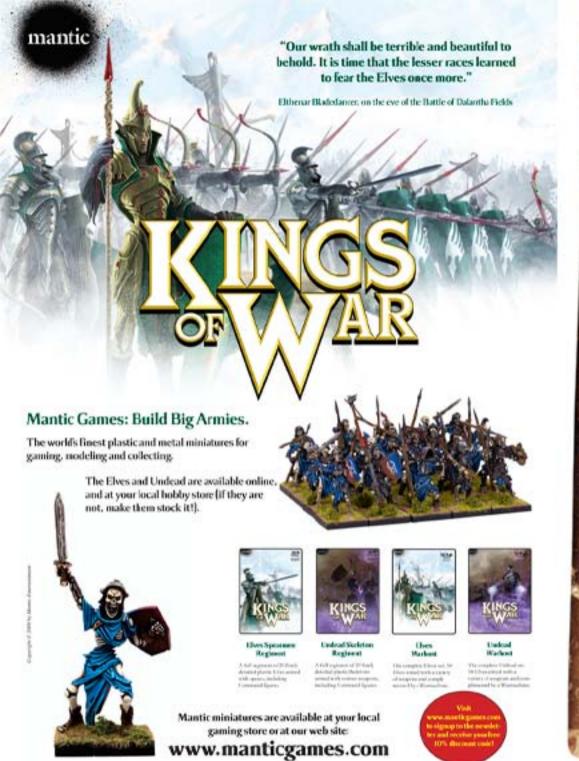
Against the Dwarves I faced a split deployment with war machines and Thunderers in one corner and Warriors with a Thane in the other. Foolishly I split up my forces to go for both. Ghouls may fight better then Skeletons, but dwarves with a hero are going to give them trouble, even with a Book of Arkhan and Corpse Cart in support. And the gun line on the hill? My poor Vampire never reached them - they were just too far away!

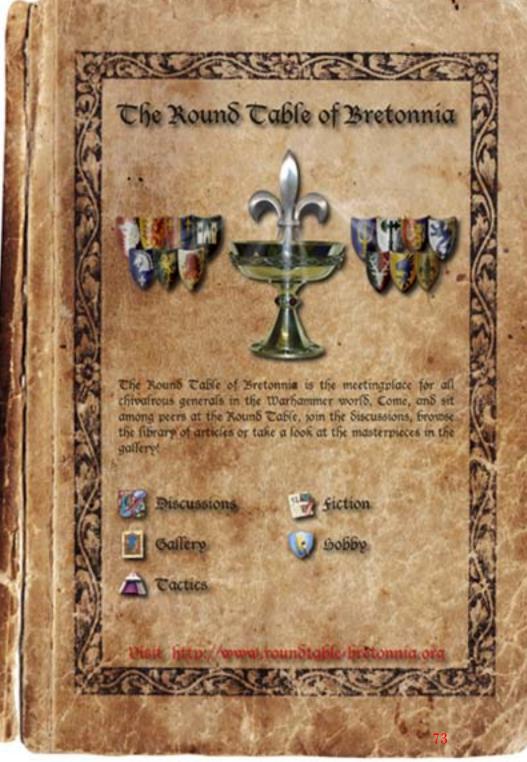
Against The Empire, my magic phase was hampered by dispel scrolls and my infantry outflanked and eaten by Knights. A Vampire is a strong character, but if you lose every round of combat with an enemy on your flank she'll never get the chance to attack!

And the Orcs? Well, in my first game against them, I learned the hard way that each Undead unit on the losing side of a combat takes crumbling wounds separately - which proved to be a painful surprise for my Vampire. I got him back in our second game, though - see this issue's battle report for details.

Still, I'm new to Vampire Counts, and my collection is still small, so I didn't expect to win that much right away, and I am learning a lot. So what should I get next? I think maybe something faster ... something... deadlier. Find out what next issue.

Malisteen





# That's Bloody Good...

Written by Red Army

## Hello again everyone!

Ever wanted to capture the gruesome nature of war on the blades of your army? Ever wonder how some models have realistic gore dripping from their models? This tutorial will show you just how to get that effect in a few easy steps.

#### Materials for this venture:



Tamiya Clear Red



Weapon of your choice

Dark Brown paint (Battlefield Brown by P3 was my color choice)

# Step one:



Take your preferred weapon and prime it black. Make sure to get an even coat across the weapon.

Step two: (Step 2 pic goes here)



Take the metallic paint of your choice and apply thin layers. Take your time and make sure to dilute your metallic paint so that you can get very even layers of paint so that it doesn't get clumpy. From there, add some light glazes of your choice to give the weapon depth. Personally I take some glazes of blues and blacks to create light points and provide some shadowing.

Step three:



Once your weapon is primed, take some of the Tamiya Clear Red and apply it to the palette. Let it sit for a good twenty seconds so that the Tamiya begins to thicken with the air. Take your brush and dab it into the Tamiya.

Step four:



Take your brush and swipe it briskly across the blade allowing the Tamiya to clump randomly around the edges of the blade. You're trying to simulate the nature of blood and entrails running along the length of a blade during a slash or stab. Take your time in doing this. Don't apply too much - this is a case where less is more.

Step five: (Step 5 pic goes here)



Add a dark brown of your choice to the mix. This will simulate the darker, deeper clots in the blood as the gore begins to thicken on the blade.

Step six: (Step 6 pic goes here)



Add the deeper color mix of the Tamiya to the edges of the blade that first made the impact with the victim like so. Make sure to give it time to sit in the air and to dab on the blade. This will create a subtle texture.

# Final Step:



Add more dabs of the Tamiya until you feel you have achieved the look. Stand back and admire the gore. You've just completed your first grisly weapon!

# Against the Green Tide

Written by Malisteen

Battle Report: 850 Points, Vampire Counts vs. Orcs & Goblins

#### Chris's Orc & Goblin Army



- General: Whirla' da Boss Basha'- Savage Orc Boss, extra choppa, Warboss Imbad's Iron Gnashas 109 points
- Deth'Cheatah Night Goblin Shaman, Staff of Sneaky Stealing, level 1 wizard, 100 points
- 18, Savage Orc Big 'Uns w/ spears, full command, deployed 6 wide 264 points
- 30 Night Goblins, full command, nets, hand weapon & shield, 145 points
- Wolf Chariot, scythed wheels, spears, short bows, 2 wolves 60 points
- 6 squig hoppers 90 points
- 2x Snotling Pump Wagon, 40pts each

## Malisteen's Vampire Counts Army:



- Countess Elspeth Von Mirrenhoff General, Vampire, Dark Acolyte, Avatar of Death (Great Weapon), Flayed Hauberk, Black Periapt, level 2 wizard 190 Points
- Roderick Pale Necromancer, Raise Dead, Vanhel's Danse Macabre, Book of Arkhan, level 1 wizard Mounted on Corpse Cart with Balefire 205 Points
- 20 Skeletons, full command, War Banner 205 Points
- 20 Ghouls, champion 168 points
- 20 Zombies 80 points

#### Malisteen's Opening Thoughts:

I lost to Chris's Orcs & Goblins the last time we met, so this time I'm out for Blood! The last time I played against Chris I learned that each vampire counts unit on the losing side of a combat suffers crumbling wounds separately, a little surprise that cost me the game when my vampire charged out of her unit to help out the nearby zombie unit. The results were . . . unpleasant, to say the least.

This time I resolved to keep my vampire in her unit, and to try to keep my battle line together so I wouldn't get picked apart, and to keep her out of risky challenges if at all possible. I know Chris likes savage orcs, and after reading up on the frenzy rules I found that frenzied units, like units with hatred, must overrun when given the chance, something I planned to take advantage of with the *Raise Dead* spell and my 5 spare zombie models. Other than that, Chris's Orc & Goblin collection is huge, so I have no idea what to expect. He could bring a swarming tide of night goblins as easily as an elite force of boar boys and anything in between, so no sense wasting too much effort on pre-battle planning. I'm playing with my entire army at this point, so it's not exactly like I can change anything around, anyway.

## Chris's Opening Thoughts:

My Pump Wagons and the big block of night goblins with nets have been doing well in game after game, so they're in. The savage orcs with spears didn't do so well last time I ran them - suffering animosity turn after turn. Still, they deserved another chance to prove themselves, and being immune to psychology due to frenzy should prove helpful against the undead. I wanted to try out my newly painted Savage Orc Boar Riders, but there just weren't enough points in this tiny game to do them justice, so instead I brought my other 'cavalry' - a unit of six Squig Hoppers.

I used Mork's Spirit Totem for magic defence in my last game against Malisteen, but that was with regular Big' Uns. Since Savage Orcs can't take magic banners, this time I tried out a Night Goblin Shaman with the Staff of Sneaky Stealing. Speaking of sneaky tricks, Mal's been rather careless with his Vampire lately, so I thought I'd take advantage of his recklessness with a Savage Orc Big Boss equipped with Warboss Imbad's Iron Gnasha and an Extra Choppa. Five attacks with killing blow could win me the game in a single round of combat if Malisteen doesn't keep his vampire safe. After all that I had points left for a Goblin Wolf Chariot - a cheap way to add some decent hitty power. A chariot and two pump wagons should give my infantry the support needed to grind dem bones into the dust. So what's the battle plan? Smash da other guys! Waaaagh!

# Deployment:



Terrain was pretty sparse - just a couple forests in opposite corners of the board. Before deploying we rolled for spells - Countess Elspeth rolled 1 and 3 - no decision to make there, she was stuck with 'Raise Dead' and 'Gaze of Nagash'. Deth'Cheatah rolled 'Gork'll Fix It' on the Little Waagh - a difficult spell for a level 1 wizard to cast, but Chris decided to keep it anyway, being somewhat underwhelmed by the alternative of 'Gaze of Gork'.

The Orcs & Goblins won first deployment, and dropped the skirmished Squig Hoppers behind the woods on their side. Zombies deployed opposite on the Vampire side, and the battle lines formed up around them for a nice brutal scrum in the middle of the board. The Big Boss Whirla' joined the Savage Orc Big 'Uns, and Deth'Cheatah joined the Night Goblins. On the Vampire Counts side, Elspeth Von Mirrenhoff joined the skeletons, and Roderick Pale on his Corpse Cart chose to deploy on his own.

With fewer units to deploy, the Vamp Counts finished deployment first, and the resulting bonus helped them win the first turn.

# Vampire Counts Turn 1



Spurred on by the Countess's thirst for blood, the undead line surged forward. In the magic phase, Roderick's *Raise Dead* was shut down thanks to Deth'Cheatah's *Staff of Sneaky Stealing*, but the shaman proved unable to stop the same spell cast by the necromancer, raising a unit of zombies to force the frenzied Savage orcs into a foolish charge & overrun! If she was lucky, Elspeth and her skeletons might even get a flank charge!

## Orcs & Goblins Turn 1



None of the O&G units squabbled this turn, but the Squig Hoppers rolled a 6 on their animosity test! Eager for battle, but unable to see the zombies nearby, the Hoppers sprinted forward through the trees. Both the Savage Orcs and the Night Goblins opted to charge the Zombie bait. The presence of the goblins in the combat forced the Savage Orcs to slide over further to make room then they otherwise would have, making a counter-charge on the flank in the following Vampire turn less likely.



The chariot, wagons, and Hoppers started circling around the flanks, preparing to surround the undead battle line.

Deth'Cheatah didn't bother to cast anything in the magic phase, and Elspeth took the opportunity to store a magic die in her Pariapt for the next magic phase. The short bows of the wolf chariot proved entirely ineffective, as indeed they failed to wound anything in the entire game. In close combat Big Boss Whirla made minced meat of the Zombies, and both the Savage Orcs and the Night Goblins surged forward. While they didn't overrun far enough to charge into fresh enemies, the plan of charging with both units had succeeded - the Vampire Countess and her skeletons would be denied a flank charge on the following turn.

#### Vampire Counts Turn 2



While the bid for a flank charge with the skeletons had failed, it was still charge or be charged, so the Ghouls and Skeletons both charged into the front of the Savage Orcs, while the Corpse Cart charged in on the flank. Zombies moved up to try and block a nearby pump wagon, but as they were now march blocked there was no way they could do so - at least, not in the movement phase.

In the magic phase Elspeth raised a new unit of Zombies, this time to block the charge arc of the Wolf Chariot and possibly redirect it into the nearby woods. Roderick's *Danse Macabre* on the first Zombie unit was dispelled, but thanks to his *Book of Arkhan* he was able to charge them into the Pump Wagon, anyway.

In close combat the Snotlings manning the Pump Wagon managed to drop a single Zombie, and the remaining Zombies managed to score a single wound in return. Sorely outnumbered, the Snotling Pump Wagon turned to flee, only to careen straight into the edge of the forest, smashing the war machine to pieces.

The Savage Orcs did little better.



Big Boss Whirla issued a challenge, hoping to catch his Vampiric counterpart off guard, but Elspeth played it safe this time, and let the skeleton champion accept the challenge in her place. The Vampire Counts' battle line managed to deal an impressive six wounds to the hapless Orcs - even the cravenly necromancer managed to drop one of the brutish thugs. In return, the

Savage Orc Big 'Uns managed to drop only a pair of ghouls. Big Boss Whirla' lived up to his title of 'Boss Basha', smashing the skeleton champ four times

over, but even this impressive display was not enough to make up for his boyz' poor showing, and the Savage Orcs lost the combat.

Outnumbered by fear-causing enemies and no longer frenzied, the Orcs broke, leaving their standard to be claimed by the Ghouls. Seeing their leader flee sent the Night Goblins into a Panic as well. Both units easily outran the shambling undead victors.

#### Orc & Goblin Turn 2



Whirla's Savage Orcs rallied at the start of the turn. Seeing their leader recover, the Night Goblins rallied as well, and both turned to face the oncoming Undead. The Squig Hoppers hopped towards the zombies, but

came up short, and the remaining Pump Wagon continued its slow trek around the Eastern forest. The Wolf chariot tried to move around the zombies rather than charge through them, but found it couldn't get very far. In the magic phase, Deth'Cheatah failed to cast his only spell, hampered as he was by the nearby Corpse Cart's balefire. Again, Elspeth stored an unused dispel die for the following magic phase.

#### Vampire Counts Turn 3



Encouraged by their previous victory, and not wishing to be charged themselves, the Ghouls charged into the Savage Orcs. Unable to charge themselves, the Skeletons and Zombies shuffled into better positions.

Worried about the surrounding enemies, Roderick Pale opted to steer his Corpse Cart into the protection of the nearby skeleton unit.

In the magic phase Elspeth restored the two felled ghouls, while Roderick's Corpse Cart successfully released its *Miasma of Deathly Vigor*.

In Close Combat the Savage Orcs once again failed to perform. The Savage Orc champion accepted the Ghast's challenge only to be slain before he could attack. The remaining ghouls managed to slay another orc before Boss Whirla again unleashed his fury, slaying four of the filthy undead. His Big 'Un retinue needed to fell only two ghouls to win combat, but with their frenzy lost and their champion slain, their spirits were broken, and they failed to inflict even a single wound. Defeated again by a fear causing enemy, the orcs broke and fled. The only saving grace was that they once again managed to outrun their pursuers.



#### Orc & Goblin Turn 3



Skipping the zombies entirely, the Squig Hoppers instead charged the exposed rear of the skeleton block, hopping to the undead between the hungry squigs and an endless tide of Night Goblins. The night goblins charge never came, however, as they failed their fear test and were left quaking in their little boots. The Goblins driving the Wolf Chariot had had enough of the zombies blocking their path, but found they also lacked the courage to charge. Once again Big Boss Whirla' managed to bring his cowardly Savage Orcs to heel and he turned them back to face the Ghouls again.

Deth'Cheatah managed to cast his spell this turn, only to see it slapped down by Roderick's successful dispelling, while Elspeth stored another die for the following phase.

Without the Night Goblins to support them, the thrashing Squig Hoppers just couldn't deal enough damage to the skeletons to overcome their ranks and numbers, though they did manage to inflict a wound on the necromancer.



Overwhelmed by impossible odds, the Squig Hoppers broke and fled, bouncing a remarkable 17 inches, despite the lack of any pursuit.

## Vampire Counts Turn 4



Once more the Ghouls charged the Savage Orc Big 'Uns and their boss, while the Skeletons charged the Night Goblins, unwittingly exposing their flank to the Wolf Chariot. The Zombies for their part charged the second Pump Wagon, which had finally made it's ambling way around the Eastern forest. In the magic phase Roderick managed to successfully cast *Danse Macabre* on the Ghouls, and with the aid of his *Book of Arkhan* he managed to cast it on the Skeletons as well, though the book's magic was expended afterwards and it could no longer be used.

The Corpse Cart's *Miasma* was also successful, ensuring that the undead units would strike first on the enemy's turn as well.

With the Necromancer's magical aid and their own innate poison, the Ghouls managed to slay not less than five Orcs. Boss Whirla, locked in a challenge with the Ghast, again was a machine of destruction, dealing four wounds to his adversary, but it was still not enough to win the combat, and this time the Ghouls pursued the broken Savage Orcs right off the board. The Snotlings in the Pump Wagon killed three Zombies, and with no return wounds managed to tie combat.

The Skeletons, on the other hand, did terribly, despite the goblins catching themselves in their own nets. While the Vampire made short work of the impudent Goblin Champion that had challenged her (if only she had remembered to raise the Skeleton Champion back!), none of the other undead in the combat managed to kill any Goblins. And despite the entangling nets, Deth'Cheatah managed to pick off Roderick's remaining wound, killing him, and causing his Cart to pop out of the Skeleton unit! Even so, the goblins lost the combat, but they managed to hold.

#### Orcs & Goblins Turn 4



The Squig Hoppers failed to rally and fled off the table. The Wolf Chariot passed its fear test this time, and charged into the flank of the Skeletons. With no other movement, the Orcs & Goblins moved straight into another unproductive magic phase, with the Vampire storing a die to use in her own turn.

In close combat the Pump Wagon wounded only two Zombies, suffering a single wound in return. Stubborn or not, the outnumbered Snotlings thought the better of it and fled, though they could only pump their Wagon a measly 4" away. The zombies could only uselessly scrape at the machine as it turned to go.

The Chariot's charge flattened six Skeletons, and the goblins got their nets sorted out, this time managing to tangle the Skeletons and Vampire in them - though not the Corpse Cart, as it was now a separate unit. Just as she was about to crush the offending war machine, the Vampire Countess heard a high pitched voice issue a challenge. It was Deth'Cheatah, leaping to the chariot's defence, and because there were no other characters left in her unit, she had to accept!



The Countess was so shocked by this unexpected act of bravery that she only managed to inflict a single wound. Deth'Cheatah had indeed cheated death! Adding injury to insult, the lowly Shaman managed to wound Elspeth in return. Worse, the rules for challenges meant that Elspeth was pulled to the far side of the unit, and would not only have to kill the Shaman but also win a round of combat before she could be moved back to attack the Chariot

Tangled as they were in the Night Goblins' nets, the Skeletons failed to inflict even a single wound. The Corpse Cart, on the other hand, managed to fell two of the little monsters. The Chariot crew, free to attack the Skeletons, inflicted yet another wound. When all was said and done, the Undead had lost combat by seven. Seven more Skeletons fell to the earth, and the Corpse Cart crumbled away entirely.

#### Vampire Counts Turn 5



The first Zombie unit charged the fleeing Pump Wagon, and sent it running right off the board. The smaller Zombie unit opted not to charge in to help the Skeletons, as they would likely lose more combat res then they brought. The Ghouls, fresh from murdering the Savage Orc Big 'Uns, ambled back

onto the field, but as they were so far out of the vampire's range, there was no chance of them crossing the field fast enough to help.

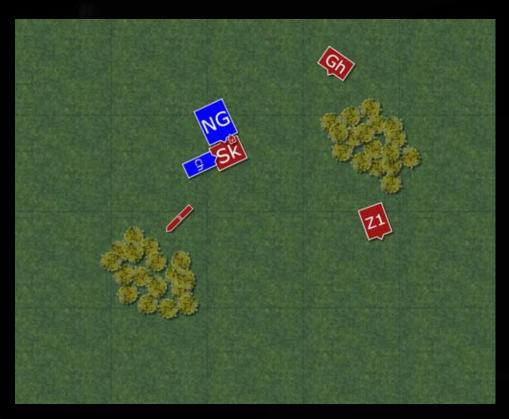
In the magic phase Elspeth managed to restore her lost wound and bring back several skeletons as well, as Deth'Cheatah proved unable to dispel either of her *Invocation* attempts. In close combat the Vampire and Skeletons were again netted by the Night Goblins. To everyone's shock, no wounds at all were scored in this combat phase. The Vampire didn't even manage to hit Deth'Cheatah, who had again lived up to his name. Even with no wounds inflicted, the Goblins won combat and the freshly raised Skeletons began to crumble once more.

Orcs & Goblins Turn 5



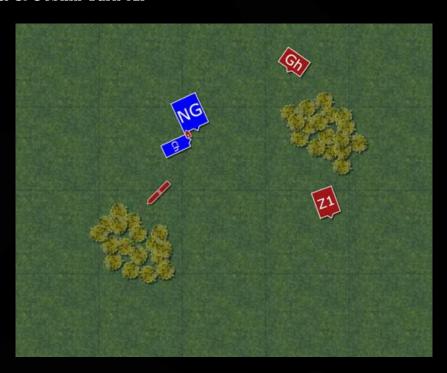
At this point the Orcs and Goblins had no movement left - all their remaining units were locked in combat with the Skeletons. In the magic phase Deth'Cheatah once again failed to cast his only spell. In close combat Countess Elspeth finally managed to slay the Night Goblin Shaman (though in retrospect it seems likely the sneaky git just pretended to be dead, and slipped away in the confusion), but the Skeletons, once again trapped in the Night Goblins' nets, failed to cause any wounds at all. Between wounds inflicted and crumbling from lost combat, the Skeletons were left with only a single skeleton remaining.

## Vampire Counts Turn Six



With the end of the game fast approaching, the remaining Vampire Counts units started spreading out to claim Table Quarters. In the magic phase, Elspeth managed to bring back eight Skeletons total with two successful castings of *Invocation*. In close combat the Vampire managed to cause only a single wound, though the Skeletons also managed to cause a wound, despite the entangling nets. Between goblin attacks and crumbling, the Skeletons were left with only four models, plus the Vampire.

#### Orcs & Goblins Turn Six



With no movement, magic, or shooting, the final turn of the game went straight to close combat, with the Goblins and Chariot both inflicting a wound on the Skeletons. The Vampire slew three Goblins, while the remaining two skeletons killed one, and when all was said and done the Vampire Counts lost by three. This left all the Skeletons dead, and the Vampire with only one wound remaining!

#### Winner: Vampire Counts, with a Massacre.

The Vampire Counts only earned a hundred more victory points then the Orcs and Goblins did by killing enemies, and at the end of the game their general was left in a very precarious situation. However, they also picked up an additional 500 points, between the slain Orc & Goblin general, the stolen banner, and three claimed table quarters, while the Orcs & Goblins could claim only a single Table Quarter. In such a small game, these bonus victory points can have a huge impact on the official results.

#### Malisteen's Final Thoughts:

Bloody Vengeance, and finally a victory for my Vampire Counts! I think I'm finally getting a bit of a feel for this army, though it didn't hurt that the Savage Orc Big 'Uns decided to lay an egg. Using *Raise Dead* to bait frenzied units into charges or block off the charge arcs of chariots was especially fun. While I did win the game, the result was a lot closer than the victory points would imply. Deth'Cheatah's incredible showing, and my own mistake in failing to block the Wolf Chariot's charge arc, almost cost me the game. Had the dice gone slightly more against me in the battle between the skeletons and the Night Goblins, I might have lost my general. Her death could easily have cost me the victory, even that late in the game. While running the Savage Orcs off the table was certainly satisfying, I have to wonder if I would have been better served by restraining the ghouls, so they could be sent back to support the general's unit.

Still, a win is a win, and a massacre at that, so I'm happy!

#### Chris's Final Thoughts:

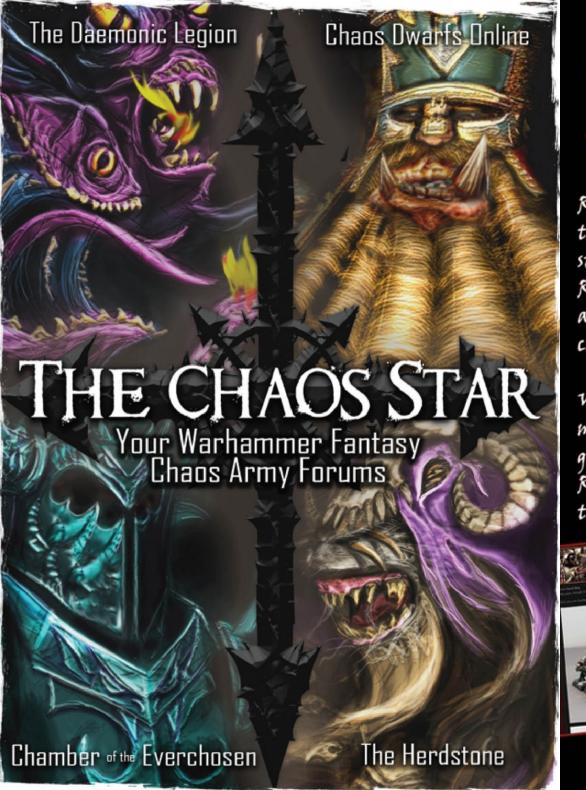
Augh! Despite Big Boss Whirla smashing everything in arm's reach, the Savage Orcs just refused to fight! Where's the killy? They managed to lose and break not once, not twice, but three times! That's just not right! The Night Goblins were great. Again. More than worth their points - the nets make them a lot tougher than they seem. The pump wagons and Squig Hoppers didn't do as well, however, the random movement would just not work out for me.

But even with failure all around, I still had a fair shot towards the end of winning. OK, of pulling out a draw, but still. Deth'Cheatah's insane fightin' spirit put my Big 'Uns to shame, killing an enemy hero, saving the chariot, and surviving several rounds of close combat with a Vampire. He even wounded her once (though she patched herself up later)! The deadies may 'av won this time, but I'll be back.

Man of the Match: Deth'Cheatah, the Night Goblin Shaman



Sure, he was on the losing side. Sure, he didn't even survive the match. Sure he never got off a single spell, and was hardly able to put a dent in the enemy magic phase. But this little goblin had heart! There were several other contenders for MVP, including the Crypt Ghouls, who can claim to have broken the Savage Orcs no less than three times before running them off the table, and Big Boss Whirla', who murdered everything that came near him, and was thwarted only by the laziness of his retinue. But Deth'Cheatah almost turned the game around by himself, and that deserves some recognition.



# check out rites of war

Rites of War has an open & friendly atmosphere to people looking for that much less structured experience. Like other sites, RoW is about meeting people of like attitudes and is open to Players of any calling looking for a board of friends.

We have a small, but active membership and are a tight knit group.

Row is akin to your local Pub more than the local GW store. This isn't a replacement

for other sites but an accessory to.

We offer our membership many services. From Army Blogs and contests, to an active Off-Topic If Row sounds like a place for you. Head over and draft a pint on my

ritesofwar?org

# The Ramblings of Nicodemus

Penned by his slave Swissdictator

Greetings, magnificent Nicodemus,

As I am sure that all of Vampirekind (or indeed, any enthusiast of the art of Necromancy) would agree, Zombies are an interesting topic of discussion when you consider their ghastly, mindless and ultimately amusing behaviour. Being as knowledgeable as you are, I was hoping that you could help me answer this question once and for all.

Why do Zombies repeatedly moan the word "Brains" while chasing their prey? Is there a flaw in the raising mechanism that removes all other words besides that one from their vocabulary? Do they wish to feed on brain-matter? What good could that possibly do them? It's not like it'd make them any smarter! Please, enlighten me!

Admiringly yours,

Count Thistlewick

Count Thistlewick,

The real reason they moan "brains" is that they are merely mocking their prey. In reality, zombies are actually marginally smarter than your average Bretonnian peasant!

Their prey, were they wiser than the predatory zombie, would otherwise have the ability to interfere with the Necromancy that drives the corpses forward. Either that or they would have successfully escaped or defeated the zombies.

So rest assured, the zombies are just amused at the stupidity of their victims. That, and there are also times when those controlling the zombies will make the zombies say "Brains" in order to further inspire terror in the enemy.

Dear young Nicodemus;

We haven't spoken in some time due to living in our respective towers and being a less than social breed; however I have always respected your quick mind and have a problem which I was hoping you could help with.

Lately when I wake from my trances, during which I visit the glorious spirit realm, I find my young get sneaking in the shadows! Well actually I haven't exactly seen him but I hear him sneaking around!

I fear the young squirt is growing ambitious but I need someone to clean up after me and I don't wish to go looking for a new slave-err-apprentice I mean! What should I do?

Many Thanks Lazy Older Brother

Lazy Older Brother,

How many times must I remind you that you don't need a get for the dull tasks? Use a peasant girl, use the carrot and the stick. The carrot would be the 'promise' of the blood kiss, and 'taking care' of her family. Never mind that by taking care you are really using them as zombies. The stick, well, we certainly need not explain that. Have her breed until you get another young woman to, eventually, replace her. Once the girl has some wits, use the mother for various experiments. You can then have generation after generation of servants.

The second generation requires the most work on your part, but for centuries upon centuries of blindly loyal servants it is worth it. Plus you can also manipulate them easily, for the cattle are so easily susceptible to emotional manipulations, such as love.

#### Dear Nicodemus:

I am a filthy undead abomination, as are you. As such, I of course know the weaknesses of our blasphemous kind. But since I am, as I already mentioned, undead (and not living), my brain is probably rotting or something like that, so maybe I forgot some of them?

Could you describe in detail the weaknesses of our filthy breed? The ways in which some dashing, young, intrepid, and ever faithful witch hunter might most easily and permanently dispatch one of our malevolent number, forever blotting out its blighted form from Sigmar's just and unflinching gaze?

...so that I can be careful to avoid those things.

Sincerely, Bloody McCorpseington

# Bloody McCorpseington,

With brain rot that catastrophic it is amazing you haven't been dispatched already. The wooden stake is perhaps the most universally deadly weapon against our kind. However, weaknesses can vary from bloodline to bloodline, and on how old and powerful the Vampire is. The more powerful lords, such as myself, can day walk without dying. However, we respond in different ways. It is dreadfully displeasing for myself, where others simply lose some physical strength.

However, if you are unable to retain the understanding of your own weaknesses you need to be proactive as opposed to reactive. Hunting the hunters may be the ultimate tactic. Slay them before they can slay you, distract them and send them on false trails. Stir up some of the cattle to worship Chaos as a distraction. Then you should be safer.

#### Great and Ancient One,

I had an experiment go horribly wrong. I was trying to see if I could make body doubles that I could send to represent me where I do not feel safe. I abducted several young men from towns throughout the old world. They were generally the same height, and looked similar enough where some manipulations could make them look the part. I did not breathe unlife into them, though I did try to use spirits to inhabit their bodies, reshape them, and to control them.

However, the side effect of using spirits is that they sparkle! I destroyed the first three and burned the corpses before stuffing the ashes into a zombie's mouth. A few even got away, and I fear they might spread and bring several more into their false vampire circle. The thrice cursed things even think they are vampires! What am I doing wrong?

Sister Tonya

Sister Tonya,

No doubt when you receive this response, my wights have you pinned to a wall and you are awaiting your final death. If you are the one who brought this plague upon the land, I will make sure you suffer for a very long time. Death shall not be swift. It will be an interesting experiment to see how long you can last without sustenance.

Were you competent, in any sense of the word, you'd be aware of Mannfred's work in this area. Either that, or you would have used corpses sustained for the short term with necromancy and controlled by spirits nearby! I do not wish to know why you kept these young men alive, as I see no use for them you. At least, no use now. I will claim the survivors for my own experiments.



# The Children of Maat

Written by The Pale Lady

Book 1: A Law Unto Her Own - Chap. 9-15 Chapter 9: The Heart Never Lies. IC -1152

Nehekhara lay in ruins.

Darkness clouded the skies; a fell shadow, thick and hungry, devoured the sunlight and bathed the sands below with inky blackness. For all his godly might, Ptra was powerless against the wicked sorcery of Nagash.

Blessed Ptra. Radiant Ptra. Impotent Ptra.

It had spread from the east like some disease of the skies, creeping slowly but inexorably across the mountains toward the Great Desert. Mahrak was swallowed first, vanishing beneath the oily-black veil. Lybaras and Rasetra were cut off from the rest of the kingdom, their fates unknown, abandoned to the vile depredations of the undying corpses that followed in the wake of the darkness.

At Quatar, the shadow halted, and for a time at least it seemed as though the guardians of the Valley of the Kings would triumph. The White Palace shone, a beacon of hope in the eyes of the desert men, and they fought with a stubborn grit that defied mortal potential. The Gateway of Eternity could not be allowed to fall.

All manner of priests invoked their gods, in vain hope of salvation from a fate worse than death. The twin lights of Ptra and Neru for a time dispelled the shambling dead, the nightmarish monsters recoiling from the touch of the sacred lights of sun and moon. Dazed and diminished, they made easy prey for Quatar's army, and the men of the city found hope, where before there had been none.

It did not last.

In a terrible battle that rent the clouds asunder, and turned the very sands of the desert black and ashen, W'soran and his dark disciples murdered the High Priestess of Neru. Bolts of dark lightning scoured the city walls and struck at the woman, and a hundred revenant shades, their chill touch enough to stop a man's heart, raked at her with their claws. When she most needed her goddess, Neru failed her, and the High Priestess died alone, a scream frozen on her twisted blue lips.

The north and west gates fell first, followed swiftly by the south and east. The charnel reek of death stank out the city, and carrion flooded the skies, their raucous caws like death-knells for its last inhabitants. Within days of the High Priestess' death, what little remained of Quatar's resistance was holed up in its White Palace, like rabbits trapped in their rocky burrows. The foxes, their lips still bloody from the chase, smelled their pitiful quarry's fear, and they grinned.

Safe in the knowledge that Quatar was broken, and the Gateway of Eternity was theirs, the darkness washed over the city and crept ever northwards, and all of the kingdoms of the western desert felt its coming. Dark thoughts invaded men's dreams, insidious and unsettling, sowing the seeds of fear in their hearts, and when they woke, no amount of exposure to the fierce Nehekharan sun could banish the chill that had settled under their flesh, a layer of cold and misery.

The dead were coming.

Maatmeses had some heirlooms. She had a pendant, which she wore around her neck at all times. It was the ancient Lahmian symbol of justice, and all members of the judiciary system - her judiciary system - had been required to wear one. All who saw them knew that their bearer's words carried the authority of the Lahmian government. To disobey them and the moral right they invoked was to invite the worst kinds of punishment.

When the Dread Lord slept fitfully, her dreams plagued by memories of death and fire and screams, her hands clutched tight around the pendant, and often she awoke with its details imprinted onto her hands, so vivid were her nightmares. Her memories.

She had a statue. Rescued from the Temple of Blood as it had collapsed in flame around her, she had managed to save this one thing. It was tiny, barely larger than the palm of her hand, and was made of a rough desert stone. It depicted the Great Necromancer as he had looked when he had still resided in Khemri, and answered to his king and brother there. His godly visage now was incomparable in its horror, and many a time it haunted Maatmeses' dreams, visiting her in the dead of night and whispering wicked words in her thoughts.

There was no escaping him.

He was everywhere she turned, from the twisted faces of the dead that served her, to the darkest, most intimate thoughts in the back of her mind, to the very voices of those around her. He was everywhere.

She also had a pair of golden khopesh. The sickle-like blades had taken a deadly toll on the peoples of Nehekhara, when they had first stormed Lahmia's mighty gates. Then they had taken a toll on those who had pursued Maatmeses and her children through the merciless desert, more extensions of the vampire's vengeance and retribution than mere weapons. She had screamed for her revenge, and the sun-gold blades had answered, leaving bloody ruin on the sands.

And they took their toll now, as the Dread Lords ravaged the kingdoms of the living with their vengeance and their bloodlust. They were weapons, and in the hands of Maatmeses, they did that which weapons do best. They killed.

But she was not the only one with heirlooms.

The sound of the undead armies was unlike anything Issa had heard before. Even after nearly a decade of war against the people of the Kingdom of the Great River, it still haunted him. Not in the sense that it made him afraid, but that the sounds struck a certain chord inside of him, playing in accompaniment to his morose heart.

It was heavy and bloated with grief.

The strained creaks of the skeletons' bones stretched out in the wind, sounding to Issa like a groan of anguish, as the stressed bones pleaded to be laid to rest, to be left to endure the centuries in the cool of their tombs, where they belonged. The piercing shrieks and rasping sighs of the spectres and walking corpses respectively were more blunt in their effect, reminding Issa of the agony that lay beyond the threshold of death. The agony that awaited him, should he succumb to the enemy. The agony that inflicted Eshe, and had done now for nearly fifty years. Her death had smote him of his rationality. Before, control and discipline had been everything to him. It had been everything to all of Maatmeses' children. She had chosen them for their rigorous discipline and righteous belief in law and order.

Now, control was as alien to him as mercy. The senseless wails of the ghostly spectres held no meaning, served no purpose. They had no identity anymore, their personalities, their selves having rotted and decayed along with their mortal remains. They were nothing but pale shadows.

He would not have this for himself. Worse, he could not bear that Eshe might be counted amongst their number! Within the confines of Maatmeses' tent, Issa wept. The crimson tears crept unashamed down his cheeks, staining his eyes red and bloody. Maddened. There was as much sanity in those eyes as there was in the hollow sockets of the skeleton warriors.

His Eshe was out there, somewhere. Her spirit was broken. Fragment into a thousand pieces by the ignorant depredations of the Nehekharans. Maatmeses had shown him what they had done. He had seen it with his own eyes. They had condemned her to a fate far, far worse than any mortal death. A fate undeserved by the woman he had loved.

"I beg of you, Maatmeses, raise her. Use your magics and bring her back to me. I have waited so patiently for your skills to grow, for Nagash to teach you the necessary arts, and now they are yours!" Issa stood before the Dread Lord, his arms outstretched, face lit with hope.

"I cannot."

"Why not!" he said, and his voice was like a scream. "Please, you know the hold she has over my heart. You know her importance to me. Maatmeses, she is everything. She is the blood that slakes my thirst, the sun that lights my days."

"I said that I cannot, Issa. Do not make me say it again, I cannot bear to see you so incited."

"She died at your command -"

"Do not say that-"

"She died at your command and now you owe her this. You bid her stay and defend your offices of law, and she did. She did so unquestioningly, knowing full well that it would be the death of her."

"My son, I cannot do this. It is impossible." He fell at her feet, and a single red tear squeezed itself into the corner of her eye.

"I have seen you raise the dead! Ragged spirits, living corpses, even the bones of men so ancient they predate our kingdom itself!" He reached out and clutched at the greave of her left shin, his vice like grip tethering himself to Maatmeses. "Mother, help me!"

"They burned her," she spat, with poison enough to kill a man. Then, more considerately: "You are right, Nagash taught me much. He told me how when a mortal, such as we were, becomes a vampire, our very souls are bound into our flesh. We become as one with them, Issa. It is what grants us our prodigious strength, our terrible fortitude." Issa shook, silently save for erratic breaths which snagged in his throat. "If we are slain, there is a chance for us to return. A chance. If our remains are recovered, then our souls still exist inside of them, and through certain rites, we can be made alive and whole once more." There was a moment of silence, broken only by the fluttering of the tent. "I have no part of Eshe. They took her apart, and burned her away, and then they will have ground her bones and thrown them to the winds. Her soul is broken, scattered in the skies and gone up in smoke. She is gone, Issa."

"No," he said desperately. "I have a piece of her essence!" His iron grip released itself from her bronze greaves and slipped into a pouch beneath his own armour. It returned clutching a folded lock of black hair. It shone with a lustrous sheen, despite being decades old, Maatmeses realised. Issa went on, words tumbling from his lips as he held reverentially onto the hair.

"She gave this to me the day before she died. She said I should never let it go, that as long as I had this, I would have her. She was right!" Silence ensued, and he realised that Maatmeses remained unchanged. No smile split her lips. No flash of relief across her forehead. "What is wrong? We can use this! It holds her essence, just as you said, just as Nagash taught you!"

"It is not enough, Issa."

"It is!"

"It is not. The soul consists of a variety of elements. You know that of which I speak. There is not a man or woman in all Nehekhara who does not."

"You speak of Ka, and Ba, and Ab, and Sekhem, amongst others?" Something akin to understanding flashed across his face, before vanishing again beneath an expression of anguish.

"I do. It is not possible for all of these parts of Eshe's soul to be contained in a single lock of her hair, Issa." It was killing her to tell him this. She had not felt such emotion in so long. All she knew was vengeance, and anger, and hate, and even, lately, fear and helplessness, as she found herself doing and saying things without thinking, or remembering.

This was something different. Issa had brought something out, something long buried, something maternal. It burned her heart with its searing intensity.

"But we can try! We can try, and see! I won't abandon her, mother!"

"What if the effects are undesirable? What if something comes back that you do not recognise, or that you do not like?"

"I would risk it, for Eshe." He looked up into her eyes, imploring, desperate, and saw the tear that sat, engorged and unbroken, in the corner of her eye. "I know that you loved, once, long ago."

She stiffened.

"Dredge back those memories, those feelings, and feel my pain for yourself." When she replied, her voice was curt.

"You know full well not to speak to me of such things. Those feelings belonged to a different woman." Issa began to weep.

"Mother, please!"

"I will do this, for you, because my love for you transcends anything I ever felt for any man before, and I know that I will always love you, my son."

She had tried to warn him, but hope and pain had clouded any semblance of reason. All he wanted was to see Eshe again, to speak with her, to ask her a thousand questions that had kept him awake at night, unable to rest, to sleep, buzzing like corpse flies incessantly in his head. Was she proud of him, of his loyalty to Maatmeses? Would she fight by his side, were she here? Did she miss him?

Did she still love him?

The slightest of chances had revealed itself to him in her lock of hair, that precious, precious heirloom, and he would not pass it up. Maatmeses had relinquished, because she loved him, and could not bear to see him so tortured. He knew that it was his own fault. His own relentless efforts had driven her to appease his requests, for good or bad. He had only himself to blame, in that respect. A bestial madness glimmered in the back of his eyes.

Words slipped like shadows from between Maatmeses' lips, filling the tent and buffeting its sides with their unnatural force. It was night, the twin moons visible as glowing slivers through the dense cloud cover, and all was silent about the camp. A guard of skeletons surrounded her quarters, stationed there by Maatmeses herself. None would intrude on her task tonight.

Sat opposite from his mother was Issa. The vampire mirrored Maatmeses' poise, the two of them knelt on the sands, across from the lock of hair that was so integral to the ritual.

Maatmeses' eyes were locked on the small token. She focussed her will on it, concentrating on the blasphemous incantation that would rouse the essence of the hair, Eshe's essence, and bring her into life. She would do her best. She owed Issa that much. She could remember nothing of her own brief love, but she knew that at the time, she had been happy, and that Issa and Eshe's own love was a thousand times anything she had experienced. It deserved her efforts.

Issa's eyes were shut. He fought the trembles that ran amok throughout his limbs. Anticipation came in ragged gasps. She was doing it! She was invoking his Eshe. Soon, he would speak with her again. Soon, they would be reunited, even for a moment. If it could be done once, it could be done again. He would have her back, if only in spirit.

Maatmeses' words came strong and steady, her voice ringing with determination and force. The dead would respond. The dead would respond.

The dead would respond!

An ice cold breeze washed suddenly over Issa, and Maatmeses stopped chanting. His eyelids fluttered open.

Stood before him was Eshe.

She wavered in and out of consistency, easily mistakable for a trick of the light, except there was none. The apparition swayed slowly, pulled left, then right, by some invisible tide. Issa studied her lips as they faded in and out of visibility, a wisp of white. She reminded him of the slim wreathes of smoke that crept sinuously up from the braziers of incense Maatmeses sometimes used in her magics. It was astounding. Unbelievable. He offered a thousand thanks to Nagash for enabling this. The Great Necromancer's works had brought his love back to him.

"Eshe!" he said with a whisper. "Eshe! It's you! It's you!" And it was her, down to the slender curve of her waist, the slight shape of her shoulders, the lift of her head - proud and confidant. She faded completely from view for a second, then came slowly back, first her hands, then her neck and face, and finally her body. Maatmeses sat quietly still, watching the product of her sorcery as it drifted slowly back and forth, her lost daughter.

"There is so much I have wanted to ask you." His tongue faltered at the incredulity of what he saw. He had wanted this for so long, and had clung to it as a last hope, and now it was here, happening.

"Why did you have to go and leave me? We could have spent all eternity together, Eshe." Her ghostly lips moved, and a whisper floated on the air. He dared not move, for fear of scattering it.

"I was doing what was right!" At the sound of her voice, he didn't know whether to smile or cry. Her work had been her life. Her duty as a judge of Lahmia had been everything to her. It really was Eshe! Overcome, he gave in to both feelings, his lips curling into a smile even as ruby tears trickled down his face.

"Do you still love me, after everything I have done? After what I have become?"

She didn't answer. Her arms faded again, then re-materialised. After a moment, his smile similarly vanished.

"I know I have killed, I know I have become a monster in my grief, but you killed too. We both killed, to defend Lahmia, to uphold our city and the honour of Maatmeses. You can't begrudge me that!"

"I was doing what was right!"

"So was I. So am I!" Again, the ghost was silent. When Issa spoke again, it was not to Eshe.

"What is wrong with her?"

"She is only Ab. She has an awareness of right and wrong, but is stripped of all other understanding. Right and wrong meant so much to her in life, her Ab is strong." She looked through the spirit and into the eyes of her son. "I am sorry Issa."

He sat and watched the shade of Eshe wavering before him. He had waited so long, and for this. It wasn't Eshe. She was incomplete. It was wrong. She had no passion, no flare, no stubbornness. Aside from her physical manifestation, there was little recognisable in her now.

Had his heart still beat, it would have stopped again now. A cold, lifeless calm settled over him.

"It is not fair."

"Nothing in this world is fair, Issa. Injustice waits around every corner, and there is no preparing for it, no anticipating it. All that is certain is vengeance, just as I have taught you."

"Yes, Maatmeses."

"Only vengeance compensates for the chaos that life throws at us. The Nehekharans have done all this. It is they who slew your only love. They who have brought ruin to your city. They who are deserving of punishment."

"Yes, yes!"

"Do not forget Eshe, but remember her how she was in life, what she meant to you, as I have done, and use it as a source of strength. Of bitterness. Of hatred. Use it to kill the Nehekharans, as I do."

Maatmeses' eyes flashed yellow and reptilian, and the fragmented spirit of Eshe faltered under a sudden gust. She peeled away in wispy strips, coming apart before Issa, and each ethereal layer bore with it a reminder of his sanity, until there was nothing left save the lock of hair.

Eshe was gone, and the Nehekharans were to blame. So ruthless had their savage genocide against the vampires been that they had eradicated every trace of Eshe, every possibility of ever bringing her back, and in doing so damned Issa to an eternity of loneliness. His lips tore back and a snarl ripped passed the row of savage fangs within.

He would have his revenge. They could not destroy his love and expect to get away with it. For years he had haunted the streets of the cities of men, killing but always hopeful.

Now he didn't have even that. He had nothing to live for, save vengeance. He would make Maatmeses proud. He would make them pay for Eshe, pay with their blood. He would drink them dry in an orgy of feasting and grow strong and terrible on their lifeblood!

Nebtawi stuck his head into the tent, his ancient eyes settling on Issa. The man had been ancient when he was turned, and he was even older now. Were it not for his gleaming fangs and lurid gaze, he would have looked comical in this heavy suit of Lahmian armour.

"The order is given, Issa. We attack the east gate again, any minute now. The blood of the city of Numas awaits!"

# Chapter 10: City in Flames IC -1152

With a sickening crunch the city gates burst open. The slabs of thick wood that barred the mighty gate of Numas splintered, mere spears against the unholy strength of the monsters that stepped through the ruined east gate and into the courtyard behind.

They were five in number, and such was their appearance that the men of Numas recoiled on seeing them. A flurry of arrows came thick and fast from the wall above, flashing through the air to skewer the undead, but at the last moment a storm of sand erupted from the ground and tossed the arrows away.

The courtyard was plunged into disarray. A regiment of soldiers swept forward into the screams and shouts, their spears lowered. Above them, the archers drew more arrows, even as a sixth figure scrambled over the final heights of the wall and into their midst. Bodies fell, broken and crumpled, into the ranks of the soldiers below, a sign to the five at the gates that Shepsit was fulfilling her duty.

The air was thick with the iron tang of blood and choking sand. Curses as ancient the vampires themselves sounded aloud and mingled with the screams and moans of the dying:

"Listen all you men of Numas; for those that burned the city of Lahmia, they will know their necks broken by a godly strength!"

The regiment of city guard smashed into the five vampires with a force driven purely by fear. Their spears stabbed forward. Snarls twisted their faces. Terror shone in their eyes.

"Any man who does lay a finger on myself or my bloodline, he will have lain a finger on death itself, and a thousand plagues will take him for his trespasses!"

The savage spear-points missed their marks, the vampires slipping and darting easily aside. A wayward arrow struck Nebtawi in the thigh, but it was no more than an annoyance to the ancient being. Then the Maatmesin pounced, the soldiers' impetus lost, and a cacophony of screams shattered the air. From out of the gloom of the broken gate, hordes of skeletons spilled into the courtyard.

"And for every man who has ever cursed the name of Lahmia, or whose forefather did so, their flesh will be devoured by the scarabs of their tombs, and they will know a pain unlike any other!"

Clutching one of the mortals by the neck, Maatmeses hurled him bodily from the swirling melee. The crunch of his neck was he landed was drowned by the sounds of butchery as her children claimed their blood-debt, their golden khopesh slicing through flesh, muscle and bone with equal ease. She watched, her curses for a moment contained, as they murdered the men of Numas, as they snapped bones and bathed in showers of hot, fresh blood, and pride burned at her cheeks. They were doing so well. Every drop of blood they spilled was in commemoration of Lahmia! Every cry if pain that split the mortals' lips consecrated the deaths of her children and her city. This was revenge. This was the punishment they deserved.

#### Vengeance would be theirs!

The archer moaned and bent double, but it was a futile effort. His innards dripped like slippery eels through his grasp, landing with a sodden thump onto the sandy paving. Shepsit relieved him of his pain with almost clinical precision, snapping back his head and breaking his spine before moving onto the next mortal without so much as a second's pause.

Her duty was to clear the wall of archers. Maatmeses had been right in her prediction that they would turn their attentions away from the undead hordes outside the city when the gates of Numas fell. It was all the distraction she had needed to scale the last few metres of wall in safety, and begin her task of neutralising the archers. They were a distraction her kin could do without, and she was doing an excellent job, she thought self-critically, as another of the incompetent mortals was cast to his death on the flagstones far below. That brought her tally to a score. The neat number gave her satisfaction, something only a child of Maatmeses could appreciate.

Her pursed lips parted and a tongue flashed out to sample the blood on her forearm. The gesture could not have been more lizard-like. It was salty, and hot. Thick. The very best quality. Men's blood always did taste better in the heat of battle. She presumed it was something to do with the adrenaline, the thrill of death and killing. It heightened all the flavours.

The second's distraction was all the archer needed to knock an arrow to his bow and let fly at her face. Movement caught her eye and her head flicked up, just in time to see the arrow loose.

The unmistakable clicks of Maatmeses' skeleton legions became louder and louder as more of the walking dead stepped regimented into the courtyard. They saw the death that the vampires wreaked; the bloodied bodies that lay ruined on the ground, the limbless stumps that gathered sand, the unblinking eyes of the pathetic mortals, and they grinned as only skeletons can. Maatmeses knew that every second passed was a second gained by her forces, as they poured through the shattered gate and into Numas itself. Briefly she wondered if any of the other Dread Lords were having so much success. The other gates were much too far away for her to make out. She had heard that Harakhte and Neferata especially were proving most fierce in their assaults, W'soran having come to their aid at the west gate. If any of the other entrances had fallen, it would be that one.

Up ahead, more warriors were appearing. They came from down the causeway that connected the east gate to the main city, and from between arches, like soldier ants drawn to a breach in the nest. Hastily they assembled into something resembling regiments, spears, axes and the infamous khopesh clutched tight in shaking, bloodless grasps. Their fear was palpable.

They could not hope to contest against the righteous fury of her gets and she, not these men. They were city guard, not hardened veterans. She doubted that half their number had seen full-scale warfare before. It was obvious to her from their stagnant fear, the pitch of their voices, the thoughts that shadowed their minds like black shrouds.

They were going to die, and they knew it.

Her lips curving in grim determination, Maatmeses gave herself to the bitter memories. She saw the flames that taunted her as they danced over the smouldering ruins of Lahmia's offices of law. She felt the heat and ash that washed from the burned-out ruins of the Temple of Blood and blasted her face. She heard the jubilant shouts of the men of Nehekhara as they torched and stabbed and cursed her kind with their petty magics, invoking their gods in their desperation to cleanse her city.

Cleanse her city! The very words brought a feral hiss from her throat. These men would suffer for their depredations! They would know the pain that they, and their cursed ancestors, had inflicted upon her!

"Justice!" she screamed, and at the word her skeleton warriors marched forward, unleashed upon the men of Numas, and such was her unbridled fury that they strode long and fast across the bloodied sands to reach the flesh of the living. Her curses raced through the air over their gleaming skulls, and for every intonation, a city guard fell. They died instantly, stone cold, their minds broken beneath the onslaught of nightmares she unleashed on them. There was none of her usual style, none of her malicious flare as she sought to stretch out the mental suffering of her victims. She struck them dead as surely as if her hands were grasping their necks and twisting.

Then the undead warriors crashed into the mortal defenders, and death knew no bounds.

Nebtawi hefted his khopesh and, grasping it in both hands, swung it forcibly into the chest of a soldier. The gleaming weapon tore through the breastplate and hewed deep into the man's chest cavity, splintering ribs and cleaving into the heart. His torso flopped uselessly onto the sands.

Kicking it aside, Nebtawi stalked deeper into the fray. The uselessness of Numas' city guard astounded him. He had personally captained Lahmia's own city guard for the entirety of his lifetime, working closely with Maatmeses and her law to keep Lahmia in the tight grip of justice. They had been a disciplined fighting force, maintaining constant vigil about the city's walls and ensuring that none passed in or out without his knowledge. They had been his joy and pride, but these men, these mortals, they were an embarrassment. He had heard rumours of the legendary guardians of the gates of Numas, renowned for their battle prowess and steely nerve.

His blade snuck out and gutted another unsuspecting guard. The tales, it seemed, had been greatly exaggerated.

Two more guards raced toward him, weapons at the ready. The spear of the first lanced out to take him in the heart, even as the second came at him from the right, axe swinging. His eyes narrowed to slits of ancient cunning, and at the last moment he ducked.

He moved as a blur, despite the heavy bronze armour that covered him. Spear-point passed overhead, and the axe blow sliced through its shaft. Then Nebtawi sprang.

Darting up, he span around, and his trusted khopesh followed suit. The blade span round, ripping into the first's abdomen and continuing through into the second's chest. They fell amid twin sprays of blood.

"This is the pride of Numas?" he yelled, his voice rife with contempt. "This is what you send to stop us? You do us insult!"

As though on command, a horn blared stark and true over the din of battle, and an intense gold light seared into his vision.

Maatmeses recoiled from the sudden brightness, white circles eating away at her sight. She blinked furiously, even as the hairs on the back of her neck prickled. What was that? It resembled the banished sun itself in its intensity!

Slowly, the dull, monotonous sound of chanting reached her ears, and while her sight returned, the golden aura of brightness did not diminish. Realisation struck her like a tomb blade: they were invoking the power of their gods to hold her legions back. They had resorted to the same desperate trickery back in Quatar, in vain hope of preserving their city.

It had not saved them, in the end. Their gods were no equal to Nagash's potent sorcery.

She watched as the first of her minions encountered the sun-shield. Their skeletal claws flew to their faces in the face of the arcane light, as if they were actually blinded by its golden aura. She knew this was impossible. They no more saw through their hollow sockets than they felt pain when a blade struck them.

Before her very eyes they began to crumble. Their bones blackened and charred, before finally turning ashen and disintegrating to the sands. Ptra's brilliance was undoing her magic in every sense - she could not even raise the fallen from their graves, so utterly destroyed were their ashy remains.

A growl rumbling in her throat, the ancient woman began to chant. She would put an end to this enchantment, before their losses were too great. They had finally broken into the city, after a month of bitter warfare, and she was not going to lose ground now! Her eyes swam black and oily and dark magic coursed through her body, as subservient to her commands as criminals before the word of the law. Great black swathes of energy crept forward from her fingertips, converging slowly but irresistibly toward the chanting priests of Ptra.

A shout snapped her from her focus, and before her eyes a contingent of soldiers marched into view. They kept pace with the advancing sun-shield, a press of glorious warriors, their blades undoing her own undead soldiers as quickly as Ptra's light was. Their golden banners were like beacons to the men of Numas, rallying the few surviving city guard beneath their heights. Maatmeses saw the insignia and spat.

"The Sun Cohort of Prince Imrathepis." She did not have long. With a bitter grimace, she gave herself completely to the winds. The cries of the carrion as they circled overhead faded into silence. The clash of axe on sword became but background noise. The screams of the dying faded into the air.

All that mattered was her sorcery.

Words dripped from her tongue like a noxious poison and the very air around her turned black and sour. Nothing was incorruptible. The dark magic tainted everything it touched.

Slowly, but with increasing speed, the obsidian swathes cut through the air. They channeled toward the line of priests, who seemed if anything to chant louder on their approach, their monotonous tones boring into her skull.

Her head began to hurt.

Flashes of white light flared before her eyes, and she fought the urge to avert her gaze. The sorcery needed her full attention. To slip could prove fatal. She could not falter now!

More of her skeletons crumbled before the combined onslaught of the fabled Sun Cohort and Ptra's wall of light. They inched closer and closer with every moment. Even her vampires were pushed back under the steely defence. She could feel their pain in her very blood, as the godly light scorched their vampire souls and stung their brains. Their pain was her pain, their bond blood-deep.

She would not fail them.

Her claws of midnight were moments away from the priests now. In seconds, they would be dead men, their flesh struck from their bones in a frenzy of movement. Their god could not save them, not from her. Their hide-less husks would serve her in the afterlife! Her flesh tickled. Her eyes swam. Veins, dark and ugly, strained at the confines of her skin.

The lurid tendrils of black energy struck the golden shield wall of Ptra, and in an instant they were undone. They dissipated like sand in the wind, and the ensuing backlash struck Maatmeses with the force of twenty men.

She was hurled backwards, for those precious seconds as vulnerable as any of the mortals before her, and crashed into a rank of skeletons. Blackness took her.

She came to with a start. Her fangs strained from her gums, and her body convulsed with renewed vigour. The sounds of battle blasted her senses. Screams. Shouts. Cries. The savage caws of a hundred hungry carrion.

The brazen horns of the Sun Cohort.

Struggling to her feet, she reviewed her surroundings. The Cohort surged nearer, their expressions grim, defiant. Her forces fled, or else crumbled and broke beneath the weapons of the men of Numas, and that terrible light-shield.

From out of the melee three of her offspring emerged. Their mouths were bloodied, and a lustrous light gleamed in their eyes, but they were otherwise unharmed. Her chest heaved.

"Where are Shepsit, and Issa?"

Ammon's chariot easily kept pace alongside the Sun Cohort, the Khemrian steeds that pulled it used to much more stressful speeds than this. His blade flickered erratically out, to decapitate any of the shambling Abominations that wandered too close, but he was otherwise uninvolved in the combat.

The Sun Cohort had saved Numas, for another day at least. Their arrival could not have been more timely. The east gate was as good as taken by the enemy, their monstrous hordes spilling through it and into the city proper. If they had been only minutes later! He shuddered to think of the carnage that would have unfolded, had the undead creatures made it into the streets.

With a start he became aware of the constant voices of the priests. Their tones droned into the background, dull and uninspiring, yet responsible for the towering wall of fierce light that banished the monsters so effectively from the desert. Even as he watched, another of their ranks dissolved on contact with the shield of Ptra, rotten flesh and brittle bone slewing into ash before its divine heat.

The Incantation of Searing Brilliance was as much their saviour as the Sun Cohort.

Wiping sweat from his brow, Ammon ordered the chariot forwards. The walking dead were almost beaten. They numbered less than a third of their original number, and the courtyard was black with their charred remains. The skeletons' best weapon was there fear, he had quickly realised, and in the face of Ptra's priests, even that was nullified. What had the Sun Cohort to fear, when their glorious god bestowed his priests with such radiant power?

"Forward!" he shouted, urging Numas' renowned regiment onwards.

Movement caught his attention up ahead, and he called over to his charioteer to steer left. In spite of everything a small conflict still raged, one of the monstrous blood-drinkers tearing into the surviving city guard as though they were but children, and not grown men. Its fury was breath-taking to behold. The unholy creature did not even use weapons, its bare hands and fearsome strength more than enough to tear open the bodies of his men and lay their bloodied souls to rest. It ranted and spat as it ripped savagely into the men with its fangs and claws, little more than a beast in human guise.

A rabid beast, he thought as he hefted his blade. One that needed putting down. Reins cracked, horses whinnied, and his chariot raced onward toward the enemy. There would be no escaping its spinning scythes, or the sharp edge of his blade. He would make sure of that.

"For Numas!" he cried as he drew level with the monster. The stench of hot ash and rotten flesh mingled in his nose. The light of Ptra illuminated his features. His throat cut raw from shouting.

His golden blade drew a bee-line for the creature's neck.

At the last moment it rolled aside, and suddenly he was passed it, and veering round for a second run. It had moved so fast! He readjusted his grip on his weapon and grit his teeth.

This time the beast was waiting. He was barely three feet away when it pounced, its face twisted into an expression of sheer hatred. Its claws raked at his thick bronze armour and bowled him over, and the two tumbled from the chariot and onto the bloodied sands. Ammon choked back a mouthful of sand and rolled to his feet, blade at the ready. His head thumped and his vision blurred, but only for a second. He had fought past greater wounds than this and survived to tell the tale.

The beast was already on its feet and coming towards him. Armour was strapped to its chest and limbs, in parody of how a mortal would have worn them, but he was not fooled. It was no more a man than he was the undead. By blessed Ptra, it deserved death.

It came at him again, its fingers - more claws - scrabbling at his breastplate. They sank into the metal and peeled it effortlessly apart.

With an earthy grunt he brought the shaft of his blade cracking down on its head, and the beast staggered back. Blood trickled from between its gums and down its lips, but if anything, that seemed to spur it on. An eerie glow filled its eyes.

"Eshe is dead, Eshe is dead!" It repeated the words over and over, chanting them as though they were an incantation. The thing repulsed him with its base savagery. He had heard the tales of the blood-drinkers, the fell nobles of Lahmia, with their mastery over death itself and their vile sorceries, but this was something else.

It was like an animal. A rogue crocodile, wandered far from its waterhole, maddened and hungry. Dangerous.

He span around, his blade a ray of golden light. It cut a deep gash into the monster's neck, opening up the cold, pale-bronze flesh there. The blow would have killed a mortal man instantly. The thing barely bled.

Enraged, it struck back. Guided by an ancient strength it smashed its fists into his chest, and Ammon was sent sprawling backwards. The breath flew from his lungs. His head span and stars exploded in his vision. Any second he expected to feel its grave-breath on his face, its fangs in his neck, his blood pumping thick and hot down his skin.

It didn't come. He raised his head high enough to review his surroundings. Soldiers marched behind him, the Sun Cohort, guardians of the Gates of Numas. To his left and right, the skeleton legions of their enemy crumbled, their yellowing bones collapsing as the devilry that held them was unbound. The sand was black with their purged remains.

And to his fore stood the beast.

Except now there were two.

The newcomer dragged desperately at the first's arms, pulling it away from the advancing Cohort and their impending deaths. It looked like a woman, although it was hard to tell beneath all the blood that covered her armour and matted her face. A snapped arrow protruded from her neck.

He couldn't make out what she was saying, but her lips definitely moved, and her eyes burned with an intensity that matched anything Ptra could conjure. The blood-drinker was resisting her efforts. Its head snapped this way and that, looking but not seeing, as though embroiled in a battle of wills. The creature looked sick.

The creature was sick, he reminded himself.

His fingers found his weapon. It felt warm in his grasp. Familiar. Staggering to his feet, he lurched forward, and in four steps reached the unclean monsters. His arms swung out with a strength borne out of desperation. This had gone on long enough.

The gleaming weapon clove deep into the neck of the newcomer, sinking smoothly through flesh until it jarred at the bone. Her head flopped almost casually to the side, connected by little more than a flap of flesh. Her scream was nothing short of primal.

Then it was on him, the first, its fangs sinking into his neck, its arms pinning him down. Ropes of saliva dripped into his skin even as its teeth clamped down, releasing streams of hot blood into its willing mouth. He could feel it as it sucked at the wounds, drawing ever more of his precious blood out of him and into its mouth, its throat, its stomach.

It fed off him like some obscene leech. Shadows flourished in the corners of his eyes, and he had the sudden sensation of being watched, of eyes boring into his mind, his soul. The last thing he felt before the darkness took him was its release on his neck.

# Chapter 11: The Weight of the World IC -1152

Priest King Qua of Numas surveyed the guardians of the east gate with a weary gaze. He himself had been fighting to defend the northern quarter of the city for most of the week, and it had taken a lot out of him. That week alone had seen enough horrors to last a man a lifetime, and the fighting was not over yet. Shadows clung to the undersides of his eyes, visible even through his majestic make-up.

King Qua was exhausted.

Beside him, to his left and right, were the High Priests of Ptra and Phakth, both wise men, whom Qua had confided in on many an eve of battle. Their gods had the power to make or break a battle, such was their vast omniscience and divine strength, and as such, their High Priests counted amongst his most trusted councillors.

A dozen slaves surrounded the king and his priests, their eyes lowered, great fans in hand. They wafted Qua and his councillors, to keep the fierce desert heat at bay, which if anything had intensified since the disappearance of the sun. High Priest Ankh of Phakth had said it had something to do with the dense cloud cover, and the unnatural sorceries of their cursed enemies, trapping the heat of the desert beneath their impenetrable clouds.

Several more of the mindless servants skirted the edges of the chamber, leaving and returning with bowls of water and platters of food. He ate and drank thanklessly, as conscious of the slaves as he was of the cats that wandered the palace. There were much greater matters that occupied his thoughts.

"My most beloved and wise father, the east gate was briefly lost under the endless tides of Abominations, but we fought back and recovered the ground lost, and even now it is being refortified and strengthened." Prince Imrathepis bowed reverentially before his father from his kneeling position, then lifted his head to meet his gaze. His eyes were strong. Fearless. They made Qua proud.

"Indeed, my king, chosen one of all the gods above, my priests help too by inscribing ancient curses onto the rebuilt gates. If the Unclean Ones try to breach it now, his holiness Ptra's blazing ire will strike them down."

"This news gladdens my heart," spoke the king, and his voice was deep, and articulate. The voice of both a scholar and a warrior. "The east gate is secure then?"

"For a time, my father, yes. But despite the words of High Priest Harkhef, I do not believe they will hold for long." The High Priest of Ptra muttered something under his breath but was otherwise silent. "The enemy is too numerous. They will return, and no matter how vindictive and deadly are Ptra's curses, they cannot smite every one of the walking dead that opposes us. We will drown in their stagnant masses."

Qua nodded once to his son. He had seen the limitless hordes of the walking dead that opposed him. The enemy's sacrilege knew no bounds. Its blasphemy burned into his soul.

"We need a plan, then, some tactic that will undo the pressure at the east gate, for a while at least. The armies of Khemri are coming, we need but to hold out long enough for them to reach us." A fifth voice spoke up, from amongst the three knelt at King Qua's throne. His words were quiet, and carried and undercurrent of pain, but they were noble and confidant nonetheless. They held the king's attention.

"We could march out."

"Do not be so ridiculous," quaffed High Priest Ankh of Phakth. "To march out against the skeletal hordes is to walk openly into Usirian's dark Underworld! You would be killed instantly, and then they would raise you back in soulless servitude of their armies!"

"But we cannot sit here and wait for them to break down the gates and bring ruination and death to your city. Until my kinsmen from Khemri arrive, under charge of almighty King Alcadizzar himself, we are the walking dead ourselves."

"What do you mean, Ammon of Khemri?" King Qua's regal tones reverberated throughout the torch-lit chamber, bouncing off the myriad of statues of the Nehekharan pantheon. The gods listened intently.

"They have broken through the gates once already, and they will do so again. When they do, there will be a terror the likes of which this city has never before witnessed, stalking the very streets, devouring your people and growing ever stronger with every man slain." His hand flickered unconsciously to his bandaged neck. "They will not expect us to march on them. We will catch them by surprise."

"You will catch them by surprise, and kill a handful, but they will retaliate and you will die," said Ankh with more than necessary force. "We need every available soldier to defend the walls. High Priest Harkhef and his Incantation of Searing Brilliance cannot hold the shambling dead off forever. The cost for such strenuous and glorious blessings as that is not light."

Qua knew that Ammon spoke the truth. While they did nothing, they were as good as dead already. Numas was a corpse, and their enemy the carrion, come flocking around to pick at the carcass at their leisure. It was humiliating, and undignified, and ignoble. His brow darkened.

"You would march from the city to battle the enemy on the desert sands outside then, Captain Ammon? And what when High Priest Ankh's words come to pass, and the rolling hordes of rot and bone and spirit turn back against you and your men?"

"I will aid him." At the sound of his son's voice, Qua started somewhat. His own son, battling outside the safety of the city's walls!

"My son, I could not -"

"I will lead the Sun Cohort of Numas and Captain Ammon of Khemri can lead his chariots. Together we will catch the awoken dead in a trap, his chariots riding deep into their left flank and through to meet us at the centre. The walking corpses of the enemy are soft, and weak. Even the skeletons will crumble before the scythes and blades of his chariots and their men. I would do this, for Numas, and for you, my king." Qua's breath caught in his throat.

"And what when they turn their vile magics on you, Prince Imrathepis? You have seen what they are capable of. They would no sooner rip your flesh from your bones than boil your very blood, or curse your sight from your head, and raise you again to fight for them!" Qua had to hand it High Priest Ankh, he was raising every point under the sun in his examination of their plan. Truly, he was a valued councillor.

"High Priest Harkhef and the priesthood of Ptra can march with us. You have seen the potency of their dazzling incantations on the shambling dead, it burns their despoiled flesh and they cower before it as though Ptra himself has come to banish their tainted souls from our deserts."

"This is unwise!;" started Harkhef uneasily, from the right of the king's throne. "My disciples and I should not leave the city. You have stressed our importance already, and we are Numas' last defence against the blood-drinkers and their foul servants. If something were to befall us, and our priesthood was no more, there is little stopping the enemy from walking into our city and taking it for their own in an orgy of death and blood." A silence settled over the chamber, as each turned the possibilities of what they heard over in their heads. Then, speaking for the first time since abasing herself before the throne of King Qua:

"Basth will protect them." High Priestess Istnofret lifted her head, vibrant green eyes settling on those of the king. They were like emeralds, sparkling eyes of the goddess Basth herself. "I and my priests will march out with your son, and with Ammon of Khemri, and through our invocations we will protect their men from harmful spells." Her voice was like velvet, sliding easily into the ears of all assembled and assuaging their worries.

Prince Imrathepis turned to look into her eyes, which seemed to swim with sensuality, and nodded. "And the Sun Cohort will guard your most beautiful and sacred life, and those of your priests, from the unclean blades of the enemies. A small smile twitched at the corners of her lips. "Worry about my priests, not me."

"It is decided then," said King Qua, a single deep breath rocking his chest. "My son will lead our fabled Sun Cohort out of Numas and into battle against the godless hordes of the enemy, and with him shall march High Priestess Istnofret, and her servants of Basth. Ammon and his Khemrian chariots will make a wide berth and come sweeping over the dunes into the flank of the enemy, in a glorious charge that will shake the heavens themselves with their magnificence and daring. You," he indicated the two High Priests that surrounded his throne, "will invoke your own gods, Ptra and Phakth, and through their blessings bring terror to the enemy. Clear the skies. Disperse the clouds. Reveal the sun in all his magnificence once more. I would have the eyes of the gods for this day at least watching over our army from high above, so that they can better protect us all from the vile undead, and witness this pivotal attack for themselves."

They each nodded, looks of consternation shifting over their features. "We will grant the gift of fear to our enemy," he said defiantly, "and they will learn a new respect for the men of the kingdom of the Great River!"

Istnofret walked slowly down the long, open corridor toward Numas' temple of Basth. It was smaller than her own temple, and inferior in almost every way, but it was a shrine to Basth nonetheless, and she would pray there. A handful of adorers easily kept pace with her, slaves, and women of Numas, come seeking her goddess' favour in love, but she paid them no heed. High Priestess Istnofret was deep in thought.

It had been half a century since she had fought against the cursed denizens of Lahmia, and longer still since she had fled that place in her sorrow and terror. She had been a different woman back then; young, naive, and in the tumultuous throes of love. She knew little of the world outside of Lahmia, of the numerous dangers that lurked in the barren emptiness of the desert.

Her eyes shifted smoothly over to regard the sky outside, the open air revealed to her through the spaces between the regular columns that supported the ceiling above. It was grey, and over-cast. Dingy. Such a thing was unheard of in the middle of the Nehekharan day, or at least, only a few years ago it would have been.

It had become somewhat expected, so long now had the corruption of Lahmia spread over the deserts.

She would have died for sure, had Basth not felt her love, and taken pity on her. The graceful goddess saw the pain that held her heart in the wraps of love, and knew that here was a woman worthy of her blessings. Only one who knew true love would have risked everything for it, risked everything from her home, her family, and her very love itself.

Risked everything and lost.

Basth had guided her through the deserts, in the guise of a fearsome lioness. The sleek creature was almost unheard of this far north, but it had appeared anyway, and kept constant vigil over young Istnofret. It guarded her when she slept, and when she awoke, it lead the way across the desert, until the morning came when she had stirred from her slumber to find herself alone.

That day, she had stumbled, hungry and alone, upon the Temple of Basth, and her life had changed forever.

She took another right, her feet gliding noiselessly over the sandy paving and deeper into the palace. The temple was not far now. She would pray to Basth for the coming morn, when battle would be met, and she could lay the treacherous Lahmians to rest once and for all. It was her duty, she sensed it. They had been her people, once, long ago, and it was her responsibility to end that legacy. Basth would guide her, and ensure that her will was done.

In the goddess, she trusted.

## Chapter 12: Maatmeses' Gift IC -1152

His fingers found his weapon. It felt warm in his grasp. Familiar. Staggering to his feet, he lurched forward, and in four steps reached the unclean monsters. His arms swung out with a strength borne out of desperation. This had gone on long enough.

The gleaming weapon clove deep into the neck of the newcomer, sinking smoothly through flesh until it jarred at the bone. Her head flopped almost casually to the side, connected by little more than a flap of flesh. Her scream was nothing short of primal.

Ammon blinked, and when he looked again, it was his own head hanging lopsided, hanging from a stretch of skin. His weapon fell from his nerveless grasp.

Veins spider-webbed across his eyes, the eyes of the twin-Ammon, angry and red against the whites. Blood erupted from the wound like one of the many fountains that filled his home, only to fall back in a crimson shower. He gurgled, the words struggling to emerge from his ruined throat. He managed a messy sentence, amid the blood that spilled from between his lips.

"You did this to me!"

He tried to reply, to avert the blame, but his lips were sealed as tight as an ancient tomb. Sweat poured from his flesh, granting him an oily sheen.

"You murdered me!" The thing that was Ammon lifted its hands and placed them carefully around its loose head. The fingers curled as they found the spots they sought. Its eyes remained fixed on him.

"You were the undead! A blood-drinker!" he managed to gasp, the words emerging all at once.

"If I am the undead, then you are the undead!"

With a nonchalance that defied belief, Ammon's twin wrenched its own head from the remainder of its neck. There was the soft, wet sound of tearing flesh and a fresh splatter of blood.

His stomach turned and Ammon gagged. Bile rushed up his throat. Stinging. Hot. Sour.

"What are you?"

"I am you," it spat. "You."

"You are not me!" The thing appeared to consider his words. Its eyes creased with deliberation.

"Perhaps I am your friend, then." And it was. Talamanke stared back at him through dead eyes, milky and still. The blood at his neck was black and solid, a thick crust of congealed gore.

It reeked of rot.

"No!" he screamed, turning to run. His feet bore him quickly across the sandy courtyard. He had to escape the horrific scene. Fetch help. Put an end to this madness. Perhaps Talamanke could still be saved, maybe it was not too late!

Rounding an ancient statue of Djaf, Ammon came face to face with himself again.

"You cannot flee me. You cannot outrun your responsibility. Your shame. Your festering guilt."

"I have not killed myself! I have not killed Talamanke!" he screamed, half a snarl, half a sob. Twin-Ammon's words chilled his very blood.

"You have as good as, Ammon." He took an uncertain step back, feeling for the towering edifice of his god, basking in its protection, the aura of security that emanated from its heights.

"What do you mean? Tell me!" The creature chuckled mirthlessly, and shrugged.

"As you wish!"

His fingers found his weapon. It felt warm in his grasp. Familiar. Staggering to his feet, he lurched forward, and in four steps reached the unclean monsters. His arms swung out with a strength borne out of desperation. This had gone on long enough.

The gleaming weapon clove deep into the neck of the newcomer, sinking smoothly through flesh until it jarred at the bone. Her head flopped almost casually to the side, connected by little more than a flap of flesh. Her scream was nothing short of primal.

Ammon blinked, and when he looked again, it was his own head hanging lopsided, hanging from a stretch of skin. His weapon fell from his nerveless grasp.

"No! This is not what I meant!"

"It is this action that has damned you, Ammon of cursed Khemri!"

The thing stepped toward him, only now it was a woman again. The woman he had killed. An ugly red weal marred her neck, but she was otherwise unharmed. Her piercing eyes stabbed critically into his own, as though she were reviewing his innermost secrets and evaluating them.

"You killed me, and for your troubles, you will die. Justice must be done, man of Khemri. Everything must equate, and your debts are mounting. The death of Lahmia weighs heavy on your shoulders-"

"I was but a boy when the priest kings went to war on that city!"

"The destruction of Lahmia is accountable for by every man in all your precious kingdom! You did not see what I saw, what we saw. The atrocities your people partook in are answerable only by death!"

Something soft crept up his legs, and before he knew it Ammon was knee-deep in sand. It suckered hungrily at his thighs, desperate to devour him. He groaned and writhed, but for all his strength, all his dexterity, the man was helpless.

A long shadow swept over him, and looking up, Ammon found himself staring into the eyes of Djaf. The great golden muzzle of the hound-headed god snapped down, its teeth flashing, thick beads of saliva raining about him.

"Vengeance is coming for you, Ammon. To hear the name Maatmeses is to know your doom."

His eyes shot open, revealing nothing but the inky blackness of his chambers. Somewhere in the corridor a brazier burned; strips of orange light lined the large doors that were the entrance to his bed-chamber. He sought out the light.

Almost as an after-thought, he slipped a pale blue robe over his olive flesh and, wiping away the fresh sheen of sweat that clung feverishly to his forehead, Ammon stepped out into the corridor. The light blazed into his vision, but it was a welcome sight, the shadows of his mind melting away before its influence. He thought of little as he strode slowly through the maze of passages that would lead outside. To think was to fear.

His mind was in turmoil.

The crackling of the torches as they guttered gently in their scones guided Ammon toward the palace's exit, beckoning him away from his quarters and toward the refreshing cool of the outside. His bed had become a prison, and sleep an impossibility. Every time he shut his eyes and drifted off, the nightmares came surging back, with their claws and their jibes and their mocking ways.

Up ahead, the twin statues of Sokth, guardians of the palace of Numas, towered majestically into view. They were made of a mixture of materials, part gold, part obsidian, and were designed to protect the palace's entrance from harmful magics, as well as mirror the chitinous black hide of the scorpion god himself. As he approached them, Ammon felt a peace of sorts settle over his heart. Beneath the lidless gaze of Sokth, he was safe.

Safe from that which lurked outside the city walls.

Small black figures moved in the distance, he could see them through the palace entrance. The doors had been left open, doubtless an attempt to clear the bristling heat that had settled over the city, and it was easy to see the small silhouettes of the guards as they patrolled the palace grounds. One figure in particular held his gaze, standing stock-still under the starless sky, and Ammon was reminded suddenly of the Ushabti that stood, unmoving, unwavering, forever guarding the palace of Numas from the depredations of others. Something of a smile tugged at his mouth, the first in many days. He headed toward the stony guardian.

"Greetings, Talamanke." His own voice sounded weary to him. Not the voice of a strong, experienced veteran, but an old man, laced with fatigue. His friend turned, and allowed a smile to split his stony features.

"Greetings, Ammon. What brings you out at this lightless hour?"

"Is not every hour lightless?" The guard's smile persisted a few seconds longer, before slipping from his face. He studied his friend.

"How are you holding up?" As he spoke, his eyes settled on the cloth that swathed Ammon's neck, but the Khemrian captain did not seem to notice. His eyes were in some far-away place.

"Every night they come for me. I cannot sleep, am not allowed a moment's respite. In the day, I battle monsters with my blade. In the night, they come for me in my dreams. I am a grown man, I have seen more than thrice as many summers as some of the soldiers, and yet these nightmares haunt me, ever stronger. I am exhausted." A hand clasped his shoulder, his good side, and squeezed.

"Have you taken your angst to the priests? The priesthoods of Ptra and Asaph especially are most adept at dispelling nightmares. Their pungent ointments-"

"I have visited their temples, but each time I have been, it is the same. Men and women pour in and out of the ancient structures, crying out to be saved, to be delivered from the deathless evil that surrounds them. Many scream for similar problems as myself, venting their terrible nightmares to the overwhelmed priests as though in saying them alone, they will somehow free themselves from their nightly torture." He trailed off. Overhead, the clouds fattened in the night sky, growing swollen and bloated off the misery and fear that flourished within Numas. They squeezed together, as tightly packed as any shield-wall Ammon had ever seen. When the sun rose in the morning, it would once more be denied the people below.

"I have dreamed of you before, Talamanke."

"You have?" His friend shifted, attentive.

"Nearly ten years ago, when the legions of walking dead first made themselves known, I dreamed then, and I still dream now. Ten years, almost. And they are getting worse."

"How could they possibly get worse, after such prolonged suffering as you describe?" Ammon shrugged helplessly, an unusual action for such a well-built veteran as he.

"They just are." He paused, and bit his lip. "I saw you dead tonight." Talamanke stiffened. "I dreamed that you were dead. Worse still, it was my fault."

"Do not say that. These nightmares, their purpose is to quell your heart with fear, to freeze your limbs and jar your mind. The dead ones would have you at your weakest for when they attack again. You said it yourself; the whole city is in the grip of their terror. Men and women clamour to the priests for balms, and drinks, and salves that might relieve them of their malignant dreams." He took a deep breath and lowered his head, eye-to-eye with Ammon.

"Do not give them the satisfaction. You are better than that. Think of everything you have achieved, for Khemri and for the Kingdom. How many orcs lie dead by your hand? How many necropolises have you preserved, through your perseverance and skills? How many men live and breath today by your account, your selflessness and battle-prowess?" Ammon nodded slowly.

Good, it is settled then. Next time these nightmares of yours come crawling back, you show them why you are Captain of one of Khemri's finest chariot legions under the sun. You show them why Alcadizzar chose you to lead a contingent here and save Numas. You show them the bite of your blade, dream or otherwise."

"You are a good friend, Talamanke. The best."

"I know," he said, his lips twitching. Ammon chuckled. Somewhere far in the distance, a ghoul or spectre howled, their unearthly voice carrying on the wind. It whistled over Ammon and Talamanke.

"We owe it to the dead to defeat them," said Ammon. "Their tortured cries are as obvious to me as the rivers run with water. They need releasing from this living death and put to rest once more."

"They will be, my friend. By all accounts, tomorrow is the day." He turned away again, scanning the darkness for movement, for untoward signs that might betray a spy or night-time assassin. Ever vigilant. Ever watchful, thought Ammon.

"Even if we are victorious, they will not be beaten, Talamanke. If we are successful in our efforts, and all we hope comes to pass, the most we will have bought is the east gate some extra time."

"And that is not a victory worth celebrating?"

"Not when we might be dead the day after."

# Chapter 13: Dread Lords IC -1152

The sick green light of the goddess Neru's moons petered through the dense clouds of night, casting a wan glow across the thousands of gleaming bones that littered the desert sands. Even Morrsleib's tainted light struggled to break through the thick veil that separated the deserts from the skies above, a sure sign if any of the undead's growing strength. It was a hot night, dry, and an erratic breeze was the only respite from the near-insufferable heat.

A solitary figure stalked through the field of bones. It moved briskly, almost awkwardly, as though it did not want to be abroad this night, but had no choice in the matter. Stripped of its armour, its white robes were revealed, turned jade in the light of the moon. An assortment of bracelets clung tight to its arms, and dull black hair hung from it shoulders.

Maatmeses converged on the great black tents that were her destination. Poison, black and syrupy, flashed in her eyes, and one word repeated itself, over and over in her head. It drove her limbs and stung at the back of her throat, and she had to restrain herself from screaming it out into the empty vastness of the desert. She hadn't blinked in over ten minutes.

Grief curdled into hatred. Tears into venom. Heart-ache into a cold fury. Shepsit had been taken from her, murdered before her eyes, and because of that accursed light of Ptra she been forced back from the city, back from the ruined body of her get. It had taken every inch of her resolve just to snatch and flee with Issa, before they had claimed him too with their searing invocation.

Maatmeses' hand shot to the pendant at her neck, feeling for the grooves there. She traced the emblem that was so familiar to her. Clutched it tight, tighter, tighter still, until the hieroglyph had printed into her palm.

Shepsit had been her last daughter-in-blood. A judge of Lahmia, she had been proud, self-aware and driven by a need for precision that had bordered on the obsessed. Her dedication had not been a fault. Far from it, Shepsit's meticulous attention to detail had aided Maatmeses in condemning hundreds of criminals, who would otherwise have gone undetected by the High Justice.

Shepsit materialised before Maatmeses, an attentive, scrupulous expression on her face. Then her neck tore open, the crack through her spine revealed in all its brutality, and with a whisper of air the head flopped over. The once High Justice's jaw set.

She had been like a sister to the Maatmeses, something that had meant a great deal to the ancient vampire, considering the vile nature of her birth sister. It had been many years since she wasted any thought towards the memories of that treacherous snake, and she would waste none on it now.

Between them, Maatmeses' and Shepsit's fanatical faith in the law matched anything W'soran or his cult had shown for Nagash, and with it the two of them had managed Lahmia safely through the decades.

And because of the Nehekharans, she was dead.

A tent loomed suddenly before her, tall, and black as pitch, and voices crept out into the night. She paused for just a second, allowing them to percolate her head. The first was rich, and evocative, a clear picture of its owner shaping in her mind at the mere sound of his voice. She had expected to find him here; it was his tent, after all. A shudder tickled her spine. It was not a welcome sensation.

The second voice surprised her, although it was no less recognisable in its dusty tone, and the manner in which each individual word was spat like some foul-tasting blood. What was he doing here?

Courtesy long foregone in the face of the occupants of the tent, Maatmeses stalked quickly in. She'd be damned if he expected her dignity, after everything he had put her through, and as for the vampire's other guest, she cared even less. Anger flared renewed inside of her, tempered only by the smooth sound of the first voice.

"Soon, soon! You see our efforts with your own eyes. They grow weak, and sicken. It will not be long now." Vashanesh glanced over as Maatmeses entered, but gave no other sign of acknowledgement. He stood tall, his head held high. The posture of a priest-king.

"We shall see. My dark lord has made it clear he would have Numas fall soon. It would not do to incite his displeasure, Vashanesh of Lahmia." Arkhan the Reviled. Arkhan the Black. The ancient liche was the right hand of Nagash, a fact he made known to all, raping his reputation in order that his commands were followed. He wore respect like a cloak, and fear as a prickly crown.

His sorcery was second only to W'soran himself. In appearance, he was more like the revenant dead, a pale, ghastly apparition, all too often sporting the flowing black robes that bestowed him the aspect of some spindly insect. Ancient, yellowing teeth, long and sharp and always exposed, chittered like mandibles in his mouth. A close match for W'soran in the magical arts, and as genius a tactician as Vashanesh himself, it was his quick, wicked tongue that had earned him his place by Nagash's side. That, and their long history together.

"Do not threaten me, liche. I know what Nagash has in store for us; myself and my kind have served him loyally the length and breadth of Nehekhara-"

"And you will continue to do so, for as long as the Great Necromancer so wishes, vampire." Something akin to eyes glowed in the hollows of the liche's skull, like the stirred embers of a fire. They fixed on Vashanesh's hands, balled tight and pale from clenching, before flickering back to his face. Both gazed deep into the other's eyes, vampire and liche, in a battle of wills.

Maatmeses was surprised when after a moment's pause, Vashanesh flinched back. Arkhan grinned a fleshless grin and continued.

"Numas must fall. The dead of Nehekhara are yours - ours - to control. We will send the full might of our armies against the walls of the city, an endless tide of the living, walking dead that will devour the hopes of men when they feast on their flesh, and Numas will fall." The words dripped from his tongue like a sweet honey, and Arkhan speered.

"At their forefront will be your vampire captains." He flicked a wrist in Maatmeses' direction. The gesture did not go well received by the embittered woman. "Each and every one of them will lead their armies into battle. There will be no arguments, no discussion on the matter. Numas will fall, and after it, Khemri. My master would see all of Nehekhara a land of the dead, a kingdom of obedient subjects, slaves to his every whim. You have one week to see it done." Vashanesh bowed and, the conversation over, Arkhan stalked from the tent. He did not so much as look as Maatmeses as he passed her on his way out.

A silence filled the tent. Then, as though she had not just witnessed the dark lord's disciplinary:

"You summoned me?" Vashanesh looked up at her through lack-lustre eyes. Dead eyes, empty of their majesty.

"You lost the east gate this morning." His voice was accusing.

"We broke through the east gate, my vampires and I, my hordes spilling into the city. We almost took the eastern courtyard, leading toward Numas' markets, and numerous shrines most sacred to them."

"But you lost the ground gained. They repulsed you." A growl rattled in her throat, reptilian and deep.

"They invoked the sun god. His holy light, it is like the acids that W'soran's priests used to meddle with. It-"

"I have seen the effects of their incantations myself. This is no excuse! Numas must fall, you heard the liche!" Maatmeses took a step forwards. Her own fists clenched tight.

"There were unacceptable loses! My own get, Shep-"

"There are no unacceptable loses. All are expendable in the war! We must fight harder, and faster, to ensure the defeat of the priest-kings' armies. Only then will all of Nehekhara be at the Dark Lord Nagash's complete control." Were the circumstances different, Maatmeses would have launched herself at him, there and then. As it was, all she could do was shake.

"No unacceptable loses? What has become of you, Vashanesh? The king of Lahmia was a nobler man than this; he was worthy of my respect." He looked torn. His jaw opened and closed in quick succession. Desperately he shook his head.

"You know full well what has become of me," he said, lifting a balled fist toward her. It glinted in the flickering torchlight. "And I am not the only one to have changed. When last did you look at yourself, Maatmeses? High Justice of Lahmia indeed. Take a good hard look, tomorrow, under the stark light of the weakened sun, and see what I see."

She wanted to slap him. She wanted to tear at his face, and punch his chest. More than anything, she wanted to wrench his hand from his arm and cast it far away, deep into the Bitter Sea.

"You heard the liche. We attack soon; I will spread the word amongst the other captains. The day after next, we will crush Numas utterly. In this task, I will bid W'soran lend you the aid of his priests; you clearly lack the necessary means to successfully storm the eastern gate on your own."

"And what of Lahmia?" Maatmeses' inflection betrayed the knowledge that festered in her heart; she knew the answer that Vashanesh would give, even before he said it.

"Do not concern yourself with Lahmia, Maatmeses. We will attack Numas, and then Khemri, and when the capital is fallen, and the deserts belong to our lord Nagash, we will converge on Zandri. Not a soul will breathe in all Nehekhara, once our work is finished."

"Do not concern..." Her sentence trailed into a gasp of exasperation. She felt betrayed. Wounded. "Lahmia was promised us by Nagash! He swore! We were to return, to rebuild it, to resurrect it to its former glory!"

"Forget Lahmia! We attack Numas the day after next." An aura of dark ferocity burst from Vashanesh, washing over Maatmeses like a breaking wave. "Go, leave me. Prepare your forces. I will talk with you no more." Then, as an after-thought, but no less fierce:

#### "I cannot!"

Were Maatmeses a more sympathetic woman, she might have pitied the vampire then. She might have seen the dull glaze in his eyes, and felt something of remorse, or even an understanding of Vashanesh's helplessness.

But she was not. She was High Justice of Lahmia. A Dread Lord of Nagash. She was Maatmeses, and she had been cheated, lied to and abused, and her vengeance knew no bounds.

Shepsit was dead. Shepsit was dead, and Vashanesh could not have cared less. He caved pitifully to that cursed liche's commands, like some pathetic slave, and not the mighty vampire that he had once been. Maatmeses shivered and she fought to restrain the savage fury that coursed through her veins. Wrinkles deepened in the furrows of her brow, and about the corners of her eyes.

What had become of their king? She no more picked at the thought than tore it apart in the recesses of her vicious mind. The question ran deeper than that, she knew, as she found herself storming across the desert sands toward her own tent. Their entire race had suffered some blow, some great disservice. They had been betrayed, the nobles of Lahmia little more than courtiers and foot soldiers under the leaden will of their dark lord.

Their lord. She scoffed at the word. His manipulations were so obvious to her now. His manipulations. His manipulations! Air sucked sharp between her lips, the resulting hiss grating into the darkness. She should have seen this coming, they all should have, but he had blinded them with his insidious ways. They had worshipped him, and he had used their subservience and twisted into something degrading and abhorrent. The more she thought about it, the more it screamed at her, until her head sang with corruption.

A single star winked overhead, revealed for an instant through a chink in the clouds. Maatmeses' head flashed upward, her head swivelling like a lizard's that has spotted a fly. The thing glittered like a gem, a single light in the otherwise deathly blackness.

A gem, like Lahmia had been, so long ago. Before Nagash's betrayal. Before the vampires had made it their home. Before Neferata had brought the taint of undeath to her palace, her court, her city.

Lahmia had been a safe place then. Maatmeses' eyes shone in the light of the star, glazed with nostalgia. Her laws had kept its people secure, and when the unworthy had broken them, she had exacted justice. Their punished screams had rang out over the deserts, a warning to all who dared to trespass against the High Justice of Lahmia. She could still smell the burned flesh of murderers, see the whites of their eyes as they ran like sizzling cream down charred-black cheeks.

A fat cloud crept jealously into the empty inch of sky, and the light faded from Maatmeses' eyes. Shadows stretched once more in the worn grooves of her face and neck, and her mind returned again to dark places. Neferata and her vampires had poisoned Lahmia with their presence, and their unlawful behaviour. They were inconsiderate, and greedy, and arrogant. Nagash, in his insane lust for power, had played them all for fools, and together the two had damned her city. Its laws were impotent against the vast armies of Nehekhara. She had been stripped of her power, her influence, that which she had trusted most in, and everything had come crumbling down around her.

It was not fair! Vengeance must be had, it must, it was all that she had left! Her chest heaved beneath her robe, filled with an unnatural vigour. The vampires would pay. She would see to it, one day, she swore! On Shepsit, on Eshe, on all her children, on her laws, on ancient Lahmia itself, the immortal aristocrats would suffer for their actions!

#### Everything had its consequences!

The men, they would pay too. For now her foolish vampire kin were safe, protected by the very prison that kept them all bound here in service. But the men of the desert, the Nehekharans with their soft, fatty flesh and thin, weak bones, they would pay. Already, countless lay dead by her hand. Their cities were sacked, their hopes crushed under the relentless tides of nightmares she unleashed upon them, those darkest of fears that she unshackled and set loose in their minds. The cursed bastard that had slain Shepsit was but one example of the fate she had in store for all the desert kingdom. While she still walked, he would not sleep. Her hatred had unbound every little scrap of fear, anxiety, panic and terror within the mortal's head. He was as good as dead already, the only deserving fate for the slayer of her own child.

But there were always more.

Always. Always. Tents rose up before her, then slipped past, but she did not notice them. Her tongue darted out to refresh her lips, driven by the subconscious need to feed. The potent feeling, the primary concern of every vampire in existence, that all consuming need to drink and drink to sate the burning hunger, was buried beneath Maatmeses' vengeance. It could not compete with the iron-hard concept. She had been raised on it, lived by it, and now it was all she knew.

There was only one left to suffer, after all others had been killed. Only one, one man, one monster who needed to account for the ruination of her city and her life. He had a debt to pay, the greatest debt of all, and even as she thought it she shivered and glanced fearfully about, for she knew that her thoughts were his, and that she had wronged him by thinking them.

Nagash knew all things, and he was not a tolerable being. He was beyond justice, if such a thing were possible. The thought nagged at Maatmeses' brain, but in the face of her fearful admonition, all thoughts of vengeance were quelled somewhat, and it was with a sickening mixture of panic, hatred and hunger that the ancient woman approached her tent. She would sleep now, as instructed, and await the order to attack. Numas would fall and after it, Khemri.

So she had been bidden, so it would come to pass.

## Chapter 14: Sons of W'soran IC -1152

There was a peculiar stench to W'soran's disciples that Maatmeses could not place. It had about it the bitter tang of rotten flesh that she had become so accustomed to since her years spent in Nagashizzar. They reeked of the very corpses that served them. More than that, the particular odour of age hung heavy about them, reminding her of the most ancient scrolls she had studied in her role as High Justice. Together, the wet stench and musty aroma made for a revolting combination. It was not helped by the oily tang of the unguents and balms that more often than not dripped from their fingers. What they applied the nauseating potions to, or why, was far beyond her interest. Let them play with their tools, she cared little, so long as they did so far away from her.

The first of the two that stood before her, she had not recognised at first. It was only after lengthy scrutiny that, with a grimace of revulsion, she had seen through the leathery flesh and sunken hollows of his face to the priest beneath. It had been many, many years, more than she cared to remember, since they had last met face-to-face, and only after trawling through years of memories, the likes of which stoked the bitter fires of her heart, could she remember the meeting in detail. Her memory was absolute, when she applied herself to it. It had been a great asset in her work of old.

The Lahmian guards had stripped the priest of his long brown robes. Reduced to a loincloth and some golden trinkets, he pulled at the shackles that bound him, raging like some rabid beast. Dust flew from the chains where they met the wall.

"Release me! You have no authority to hold me here, mortals." The guards shuffled back, out of reach of the demented scholar. The priests of Lahmia were to be respected by the populace. This was common knowledge, yet something about the ranting vampire unsettled the two men that guarded his cell. This was no scholarly priest, no wise alchemist, or immortal wizard. This was an animal, sick, hungry. Dangerous.

"We detain you on authority of the High Justice Maatmeses, priest. Control yourself!" The vampire spat at their words.

"I shall do no such thing! It is of the utmost importance that I am let free!" He continued to pull and writhe at the manacles, the clanking of the chains filling the small room.

Unnoticed by the guards, his eyes grew black and oily. Tendrils of cloying smoke wound from his outstretched fingertips, converging on his captors. The stench of rotting flesh filled the chamber.

"And what could possibly be of such importance, priest?" Maatmeses strode into the room, Eshe by her side. Upon her arrival the dark magic dissipated as quickly and easily as smoke in the wind. His eyes clearing, the priest fell back into the corner of his cell.

"You! You cannot hold me here -"

"Actually, I can. I can detain you for as long as I deem necessary, and I can do so much more than simply hold you here." The threat was subtle, but it was not missed. The vampire hissed and burrowed his head in his arms. Maatmeses studied the wretch. He was typical of the priests of Lahmia. Doubtless he spent his days perusing the long, dusty passages of the Great Library, or holding vigil at one of the many shrines that dotted their noble city. His pallor certainly hinted as much. He lacked the golden skin of the Nehekharan, having obviously spent far too long indoors.

What was such a scrawny, pathetic excuse for a vampire doing sneaking from their city? He had not been excused. No official document granted him passage through the desert, so what was he up to?

It was possible that he, like so many of Ushoran's offspring, had grown bored with Lahmia. Possible, but unlikely. The creature was of W'soran's blood, to begin with. His life was devoted to scrolls, and rites, and incantations. He was a scholar, not some disinterested noble, grown bored with the city's offerings.

Something did not add up.

"What is your name, priest?"

"My name? My name is Melkhior."

"Where were you headed, Melkhior?" The priest chuckled quietly into his arms. "I asked you a question, priest. What was your destination? You have no clearing to leave the city."

"My destination is my own business, and that of my master. Take it up with him, if this matter is so precious to you, judge." Maatmeses' lips curled back over her gums, and with a critical glance she backhanded the get across his cheek.

"You will address me as High Judge, as is appropriate. Do not forget yourself, do not think for an instant that you are protected because of your lineage. All succumb to the cold hand of law. I will take this up with your master, if you will not divulge your secrets." Her voice trailing off into a hiss, the ancient vampire turned to Eshe.

"Go to the Temple of Blood, Eshe. High Alchemist W'soran is in council there with the Queen tonight." Neferata and her pet wizard had taken to spending increasingly large amounts of time around each other recently. They had always been close, but her informants had made it clear the two were thick as thieves of late. She didn't trust Neferata as far as she could throw her. The woman was a snake in human guise. No, worse than that, a daemon.

W'soran was no better.

"When he leaves council, inform him that I wish to arrange a meeting, tomorrow morning, to discuss this latest turn of events. I will cancel my duties to attend, and expect him to show the same courtesy." Eshe nodded and left the chamber.

"You," she ordered, eyes fixed on the cowering priest, "are coming with me. It seems you cannot be trusted to remain here voluntarily, if your earlier attempt at sorcery was anything to go by. It is the Catacombs for you, until this matter is resolved."

The whimpers that escaped his throat brought warmth to Maatmeses' dead heart.

Melkhior. Melkhior. The name grasped at her gut and wrenched it aside, twisting her insides into painful shapes. Melkhior, the servant of W'soran. One of his most trusted. So trusted, that it had been he who Lahmia's High Alchemist and most learned scholar had first dispatched to deal with Nagash, all those decades ago.

She could still remember the acid burn of uncertainty that had sat in her stomach, when his dealings with the Great Necromancer had been revealed to Lahmia's court. He was their ally, W'soran had argued. Nagash was a radical, yes, but his views were not so vile as had been previously made out. The Khemrians especially had spurned him and his ideas, uniting his enemies against him in their desperation to force him from the city and out of their minds.

Nagash could be trusted. Nagash would help us. Nagash understands what we are, the ancient power that keeps us strong, and tough, and young.

He understands our thirsts.

Yes, she had met Melkhior before, and in doing so had opened up a pot of rotten worms at the very heart of Lahmia itself. He had a lot to account for, she thought, her gaze like stone. He did not look up from the ground, evidently remembering the turn of events from his own narrow perspective.

The other priest, she had not met before. The creature had introduced itself as V'azrin, an acolyte of W'soran's. It was not especially imposing, of average height and tarred with the same irrevocable decay that consumed the rest of their priesthood. Long black robes draped across the skeletal-thin figures of both the vampires, offset by the pale gleams in their eyes. A permanent grin tugged at the corners of their faces, sly and gruesome, a bi-product of their fatless bodies. The expression was unnerving.

"You are here on W'soran's orders, yes?"

"We are," rasped V'azrin, his lurid gaze almost a match for her own.

"Then you will do as I instruct. Tomorrow, the east gate must fall, and Numas with it. You will aid my forces in this task." They both stared at her now, their eyes unfaltering. They reminded her of crows, or vultures, watching her carcass with a fierce attention, making certain of its demise before darting close to feed.

She was far from some rotten carcass, she reminded herself.

"What would you have us do?" Melkhior's voice no more came from his mouth than slid from it, an ancient hiss that rattled in his throat and slipped through his teeth. He sounded exactly as a corpse would have, could it talk, she decided. His voice was much changed from the passionate, desperate, youthful sound she remembered it.

"You will strike the men from the walls with your incantations. Melt their flesh, steal their souls, do whatever you have to, just clear the walls of their soldiers."

"This is most simple," scoffed V'azrin, something that Maatmeses decided was a laugh seeping from between his desiccated lips. "You needed us for this? I would have thought it even within your means."

"Hold your tongue, priest, there is more to come." He looked fit to argue, but kept his thoughts to himself. She recognised the helplessness, for she had known it herself a thousand times since embarking on the campaign, but she did not pity him. She was largely unfamiliar with the concept.

"The priests of Ptra have been my bane. They invoke their god, and bring about his cursed brilliance to banish the magics that bind my hordes together. The flesh of my children seem to burn and boil, and it is through these defences that the east gate has not fallen."

"They invoke Ptra himself, and he answers?" V'azrin spoke again, respect audible in his words.

"They do, but I would have you prevent them."

"You do not know what it is you ask," snapped Melkhior as though she were some child. His robes shifted as he lifted a hand to scratch his shaven head. He looked the picture of one of the shades that haunted Usirian's Underworld. "You cannot simply 'block' a god's favour! If Ptra is blessing them so regularly, and with such awe-inspiring power as you describe, it will be no small feat to counter his efforts."

"Then you will be undertaking a large feat. I do not care. I am relying on your sorceries. If the east gate does not fall, on both your heads be it." At this the priests looked aghast.

"But Ptra-" hissed V'azrin.

"You will make your sacrifices, cast your incantations, do whatever is necessary! I will not be disobeyed. My word is law! Fail me in this, and I will come looking for recompense!"

"It will be done," muttered Melkhior and V'azrin together, but before another word could be said, a brazen horn rang out somewhere outside. Another followed suite, followed quickly by a third. Maatmeses recognised the sounds from her previous assault against the gate, and upon hearing them, her face contorted beyond all human recognition. Dark veins crept out from her hairline, her lips drew back over crocodilian teeth and a guttural growl rumbled inside of her.

The Sun Cohort of Prince Imrathepis. The guardians of the gates of Numas marched against her.

The High Priestess of Basth toyed with her gauntlets. A nervous anticipation teased her features, evident only from the slightest crease in her brow. Arrayed before them, a numberless tide of the living dead spilled forth, shambling awkwardly across the uneven sands in a macabre tide of bone and rot.

Istnofret watched the hordes spill closer. She had not been taken aback by their numbers; their armies had staggered the length of Nehekhara, and every victory bolstered their own ranks. It had come as no surprise to her that they were as numerous as the very sands themselves.

What they had in quantity, they lacked in quality. Even as she watched, the graceless corpses tripped and shuffled closer, in retaliation to the Sun Cohort's sudden appearance. Their limbs shot out before them, legs and arms tugged in a vile parody of the movements of the living. The skeletons were not much better, she noticed, her emerald eyes flashing in the gloom. There was more of a formation to their regiments, more order, but they were thin and brittle. Just bone.

They were less than men in every respect.

By contrast, her own forces were disciplined, strong, skilled, and filled with a passion that the risen dead could never imitate. These men, the Sun Cohort of Prince Imrathepis, were the pride of Numas. They would fight to defend their city, their home, with their very last breath. The dead would crumble before their fearless might, and the brutal strength of their spears and khopesh.

The priestess tugged gently at the gauntlets that clung to her fists, her delicate fingers sliding the length of the talons that emerged, claw-like, from their end. They would tear the soft, spoiled flesh of the enemy, and return them to the sands from whence they came. It was where they belonged. They had no right to walk the deserts, trapped by the dark magics that animated them.

The guardians of Numas advanced, and Istnofret's priests with them, marching under the clouded skies toward the hordes of dead. The plan had begun. Their fates rested in the hands of the gods now. She took another deep breath, calm and in control. May Basth watch over all of them.

The enemy were repulsive. She could see them in the distance, her keen sight picking out individual monsters as they stumbled closer. Some were the recently deceased, their bodies corrupted by potent magics, their eyes lit like eerie braziers. Others were little more than skin and bone, dry and papery, having long dwelt under the hot, waterless sands of the deserts.

Their awakening was blasphemy! The dead were sacred! She would see to it that they were banished, laid to rest once more, and Numas saved. It was the least she owed the desert kingdoms, for the involvement that she felt. She was born in Lahmia, and the fell captains of their enemy were once her rulers, her priests, her nobles, all those decades ago.

More horns sounded aloud, ringing stark and true under the overcast skies. The noises echoed the honour and bravery that filled each of the men's hearts. She could feel it in the air, in the grim grit of their teeth, the steely glares of their eyes. These men would fight for Nehekhara, and she with them. It was her duty to see the once noble Lahmians slain, and the evil that they stood for destroyed forever. She owed it to Basth, to her priests and to the men and women of Numas, but she owed it to her memory of Lahmia, too. It had not always been a city of monsters. There had been love there, her love, and family. Her mother and father, who had died when she was little more than a child, and her sister, who through her irrepressible love she had hurt so much. They were all long dead, but their memories lived on, and she would honour them.

Basth would honour them!

"Forward!" cried a voice up ahead, that she recognised as belonging to Imrathepis. It was strong. True. A voice worthy of a prince. All around her, his legion picked up their pace, a constant march across the unusually grey sands toward their vile foe. She and her own priests kept pace, marching at the centre of the formation, protected on all sides from the depredations of the undead. Without the sun, their golden staffs were robbed of their gleaming magnificence.

That would all change, soon.

To her right, trusted Nebankh clutched a talisman and muttered under his breath. She recognised the blessings of Basth when she heard them; they were as much a part of her as her hair, her eyes, or her soul. All around her, the other priests were invoking similar rites, their mumbled blessings and swift incantations summoning the attentions of the beautiful cat goddess and requesting her aid.

They had nothing to worry about. She could feel the blessing of Basth coursing through her body, filling her limbs with an ancient vigour that belied mortal comprehension. Their goddess was with them, and would watch over her most favoured disciples with a keen interest. Of this, Istnofret was sure.

The dead were almost upon them now. She could hear the groans that burst from their broken throats, the grunts and sighs that slipped into the air in a terrifying chorus of deathly noise. The skeletons marched silently, staring through their eyeless sockets and grinning mockingly, that irreversible smile etched on their taunting skulls. They were a morbid reminder of the fate that awaited the men of Numas, should they fall in battle.

They would make sure they did not.

With the unnatural sounds came an even worse smell, of pus, and grime, and the dust of the necropolises. Istnofret recognised the stench of rotten fish, for she had smelled it before, when scraps were carried into her temple by blessed Basth's cats. Their enemies' eyes were creamy white, like spoiled milk, and shone with a sick light that mirrored the glare of the dark moon of Neru.

Everything about them was repulsive.

They were metres away now. In a minute, the Sun Cohort would reach them, with their sharp spears and deadly aim. Now was the time to act. Slowing to a standstill, Istnofret turned to her contingent of priests. They looked at her through aged eyes, rheumy with wisdom and understanding.

"Devoted of blessed Basth, begin the Incantation of Jaded Healing! For the graceful goddess Basth, and for Numas!" Her words slipped strong and husky from between her lips, a voice of defiance, and beauty. Her priests recognised the voice of Basth when they heard it, and as one they began to chant. They spoke in unison, their arms upraised, staffs held high, and slowly, with a confidence amassed from decades of practice, their incantation took form.

Even as she chanted Istnofret looked up, and saw the clouds beginning to move. They barely inched across the skies, great black thunderclouds, swollen and thick in the air, but they moved nevertheless, and she knew that back at Numas, safely behind the city walls, the priests of Phakth had begun their own incantations. That left only High Priest Harkhef and the acolytes of the Sun God.

As though on command, a searing flash of light tore into existence, flashing behind her like breaking dawn, and she knew without turning that the Incantation of Searing Brilliance had taken hold. The walls would be safe from the fell attentions of the undead, while Ptra's priests chanted.

Then all thought was lost to her mind, for with a gut-wrenching clash the forces of Imrathepis collided with the despondent dead, and reason lost all meaning to the screams and butchery of battle.

Maatmeses stormed out of her tent, Melkhior and V'azrin seconds behind her. Outrage marred the woman's features. The sheer audacity of the treacherous mortals; that they should dare to make a stand against her forces! Did they not owe her enough already!

Even as she watched, the dead of Nehekhara clashed against the living, bloodied corpses fumbling blindly for the necks and pulses of the soldiers. The men fought back, their shining blades cleaving through rotten flesh and bone with ease. The dead were no match for the Sun Cohort, she could see that much. Barely a handful of the hated mortals had fallen in the initial clash, compared to the droves of revenant dead. They were reaping her forces like a scythe through crop.

"What are they doing?" spat V'azrin, watching as the Sun Cohort battled nearer. "They are more stupid than I thought!" Melkhior snickered dustily, and his companion continued. "Let them slay the corpses; we shall raise them back again, and more still, until they drown in a sea of undeath!"

Maatmeses' eyes flashed like glittering topaz; the foolish men had made her own task a hundred times easier. Without the protection of their tall walls, the mortals had as good as condemned themselves to Usirian's shadowy Underworld. Her jaw slipped open, as though to savour the taste of death that had filled the air. Blood splashed abound, dripping from the wounded soldiers, and leaking from the broken bodies of her own corpses.

Her hands clenched tight, as, inspired by the rank taste of hot, fresh blood, images flickered through her mind. They vanished the instant they appeared, too quickly for her to decipher, but fuel for the vengeful furnace that smouldered always in her subconscious.

In moments, it had become a raging inferno.

Her face assumed a daemonic visage. She looked as much a woman as a monstrous crocodile, her eyes slits, her nose short, her cheeks askew. The disciples of W'soran took an uncertain step back.

"They set alight to the Temple of Blood," whispered Maatmeses. "They tore down our statues, they burned my edicts."

"What are you talking about?" ventured V'azrin, something of disgust registering on his similarly unwholesome features. "None but the oldest amongst them would have been alive when Lahmia burned." She continued heedless, unhearing.

"They murdered my children, those noble men and women who guarded our city and eased it safely through the decades. They put them down, like animals. Beasts."

"What-"

"I will have vengeance. I will have vengeance. I will have vengeance!"

There was a subtle change in the air; barely perceptibly, but to the practiced senses of the sons of W'soran, it was like watching the few grains of slipping sand that preceded the collapse of a sand dune. Their bottomless gazes shot upwards, in time to see the clouds shift. A hiss of trepidation escaped V'azrin. Below, the battle waged nearer.

"They are invoking their gods," said Melkhior, with more than a hint of curiosity. There was no fear in his voice, despite the gravity of which he spoke. "The clouds are shifting, they mutter the incantations of the great god Phakth, he who sees all, and implore to him to clear the skies."

"Stop them," said Maatmeses.

"I cannot simply-"

She turned for a moment, locking gazes with both the dark acolytes, and such was the stony coldness of her ancient gaze that their words died on their thin, dry lips.

"Kill them, corrupt their flesh, inflict a thousand tortures upon them. I don't care, just stop their incantations. They must pay." The vampires bowed and slipped back into her tent, to retrieve the tools of their trade.

They were already forgotten to the ancient woman. She stared down at the battle unfolding before her through vindictive eyes. Blood and screams filled her head, both past and present, and it was only when a sudden flash of light illuminated the distant wall of Numas that she broke from her reverie. She looked down in time to see a wave of chariots, Khemrian in their insignia, crash into the flank of her undead horde. The shambling dead were no match for their speed, and the sudden smash of their impact. Rank after rank fell beneath their rolling wheels, and the hooves of their desert steeds.

She unsheathed the two khopesh that hung from her waist. It was time. Time for vengeance. Time for death. Time for the men of Numas to feel the weight of their crimes. She would punish them for their indiscretions, and the indiscretions of their forefathers. Her children fought down there, the last of the Maatmesin, and she would join them in their vengeance. In their slaughter. She would have retribution!

With a deep growl, that could have come from the scaly throat of a crocodile itself, Maatmeses raced down the dune and into the fray.

The crunch of snapping bones as they ground beneath the swirling wheels of his chariot was as endless as the Great Desert itself. Captain Ammon of the Chariot Cohort of Khemri rode thick and fast into the fray, his golden weapon biting deep into the necks of the shambling dead. They were as numerous as the waves of the Bitter Sea itself, but he and his chariots were as the great warships of Zandri, streaming through the water's surface with unstoppable power and grace.

Screams filled his ears, bestial sounds that shook him to his core; the horses whinnied and whickered as they trampled the Abominations beneath their hard hooves. Moans of despair and anguish rose up from the horde, mingled with grunts and cries of unnatural hunger. They were almost indistinguishable in their sounds, something that grated on Ammon's resolve. Were the corpses conscious? Did they know themselves, their former lives? Or were they mindless animations, that knew nothing but a fierce hunger for his flesh?

Chariots streamed forward to his left and right, his closest comrades and most capable of soldiers. To his left, Talamanke struck out with his mighty axe, the weapon cleaving through the stick-thin necks of their enemies. He jeered as he hewed their heads from their shoulders, the morbid chore tickling his grim sense of humour. A madness glinted in his eyes as he hacked and slashed with his giant weapon, something Ammon had seen many times in the heat of battle. It took a hold of you, spurred you on, held you in its bloody confines so that all you knew was death and pain and sweat.

He brought his own gleaming weapon arcing round, burying it in the spine of a former Nehekharan, and barely dragging it free in time before his chariot carried him away. Pride, and a sick satisfaction at the corpses second death, warmed his heart, and Ammon realised with more than an ounce of certainty that his own eyes were probably just as manic.

Overhead, the grey clouds remained, although he noticed small chinks of light pierced its cover. They were hard to discern against the glorious light of Ptra, which shone from the eastern wall, but they were definitely there. Phakth, the hawk-headed sky god, was being invoked. If his efforts, and those of his priests, continued, the sky would soon be cleared and once more the magnificent Nehekharan sun would bathe the deserts in golden light.

Grunting, he tore into the body of another man, whose eyes were empty sockets. Its flesh was soft, and more like wet papyrus than skin. His blade made short work of the unnatural creature.

Their momentum had carried them thick into the fray. The blood-drinker's hordes were many, and if they did not meet up with Prince Imrathepis and the Sun Cohort soon, he and his chariots would be stranded, islands amid a sea of living dead. It was not a prospect he appreciated.

Two more of the shambling monsters bounced off the chassis of his chariot. The first vanished beneath the wheels of his mount, but the second grabbed on at the last minute. Groans escaped its ruined mouth, and the terrible creature crawled bodily over the side of the chariot, even as its legs and pelvis were ripped out from under it.

This close, the stench was intolerable. Ammon fought the urge to gag, instead stamping down on the head of the thing. It cracked like an egg under his sandaled foot, its grasping arms falling limp. He kicked it away.

Up ahead, the Sun Cohort carved a bloody swathe through the undead ranks. He watched their impressive blades rise and fall, swatting the corpses and skeletons aside and deflecting their feeble blows, returning with fatal strikes of their own. Heads rolled. Bones shattered. Pus-filled flesh was stripped from muscle. Truly, he noted with mounting respect, the Sun Cohort were a force to be reckoned with. He could see now why they were so fabled, and why they above all of Numas' other forces were assigned to protect its four main gates.

For a terrible second, he pondered the fates of the other three gates, those to the north, west and south of the city, while their legendary guardians fought here. Quickly he dismissed the thought from his mind, and focused on the task at hand.

His muscles burned from hefting his weapon back and forth into the ranks of the enemy. They had not been fighting long, but he had been unable to sleep many nights, and was feeling the dull creep of fatigue as it threatened to petrify his heavy limbs.

He couldn't give in. His life depended on it. His afterlife depended on it, judging by the vast number of freshly raised faces that he lay to rest. Many were barely recognisable as being dead, save the bloodied wounds that covered their bodies, and the pulsing witch-light in their eyes.

It was not a fate he fancied for himself.

"Talamanke!" he shouted, over the chorus of deathly despair. His oldest friend decapitated a revenant corpse with a single strike, and turned to face Ammon. Veins stood out thick on his arms, and in his neck.

"Ride left! We will cut in now, before our impetus is lost!" A single nod sufficed as response, and leading the rest of their regiment, the two veered slowly to the left. The cracks of their drivers' whips added to the hellish cacophony of sound that assaulted Ammon's senses.

Gradually, the chariots curved round, their destination the flashing blades and chanting priests of Imrathepis' Sun Cohort, and the disciples of Basth respectively. Once there, the combined forces of all three would prove a hammer against which the abominations could not hope to compete. The dark shroud that bathed the deserts was slowly dissipating. The lights of Ptra shone ever constant in the background, atop the eastern wall, a beacon of radiant hope for him and his men as much as it was a source of despair for their enemies.

The Abominations would be destroyed, forced back, and the eastern gate completely cleared, until more of the undead shuffled around from the other gates at least.

But a victory was a victory, and it was within their grasp. The captain allowed himself a brief smile, grim but proud. They were so close, and then he could return to his quarters, and rest his aching body. With the legion of Nagash banished, he was sure his nightmares would vanish, and he could finally get some peace.

There was a thud as his chariot's left wheel mounted an especially burly corpse. It crunched beneath him. More screams, this time to his right, as a wayward spear had taken one of his soldiers in the chest. He could see where it had slipped past the breastplate, even as the unfortunate soul toppled from the back of his chariot. Ammon turned away. He would not watch the resulting orgy of feasting.

He could hear the shouts and cries of the Sun Cohort now, distant but audible over the groans of the corpses that staggered awkwardly toward him, then passed. They could not compete with his chariot's speed. Their leathery fingers raked its chassis.

Yet more slipped and broke beneath his war chariot. Before him a ray of light shone weakly through the cloud cover. His driver's whip cracked again. Shouts from behind him. The crunch of broken bones.

Then he was spinning, the terrified screams of his chariot's horses tearing into his gut, and the breeze buffeted his face.

There was a weightlessness. He was flying. Blood ran into his eyes.

With a thud he hit the sand.

The floored horses flailed and screamed, their eyes white, mouths frothing. Maatmeses knew terror when she saw it. Nightmarish visions exuded from her mind, seeping into the heads of any men that strayed too close, and polluting their thoughts. They felt her pain. Her anguish. The agony that wracked her undead frame.

With a cold fury, Maatmeses stepped around from the path of the wrecked chariot, and towards its rider. The risen dead parted before her like slaves before a priest king, her iron will casting them back. This was between her and the mortal. Those corpses that did reach out, fumbling eagerly for her enemy's throat and blood, she dismissed instantly, their husks falling limp to the sands.

A hoof kicked madly out, striking her abdomen, but Maatmeses did not so much as acknowledge the wayward blow. She had only eyes for the curled figure on the sands. He was the one responsible for Shepsit's death. She could feel it. Feel him. He had wronged her, and now he would be punished.

More chariots sailed passed her through the thick horde of undead, but none dared too close. Her aura of vengeance was absolute, keeping the mounts of Khemri at bay.

She was metres away now. Her lips parted in silent exultation. Unblinking eyes fixed on her quarry. The criminal. The wrong-doer! He would suffer!

One chariot doubled back, cutting a sharp half-moon through the shambling dead and heading directly for her back. She felt the young, fresh minds approaching, as much as she heard the grind of the chariot itself. Hope and terror engulfed the mortals, soldier and driver, as they neared her, with their large axe, spinning scythes and sharp hooves.

Screams filtered over the din of battle, mingling obscenely with the desperate moans of her dead, and the clash of weapon on weapon as man fought skeleton in the distance.

She turned then, her eyes ablaze with an icy fury that struck the charging horses dead. Their bestial minds were as two small desert termites against a torrent of boiling water.

The stench of urine washed over her as the dead beasts released their bowels. It was swiftly enveloped by the rotten smell of the dead. Both riders toppled from the chariot, sacks of muscle and bone, of no more consequence to the vampire. She span on her heel.

"You." The word was lost in the maelstrom of battle, but it reverberated within the man's head, chilling him to his very bones. He writhed under her voice, face buried in his arms and sand, legs curled.

"You murdered my daughter." The words were like hammer-blows, striking his head, knocking him back. With a brutal carelessness she invaded his mind

"Ammon! Ammon. So that is your name, murderer."

"I am no murderer!"

The sheer savagery of her response sent him sprawling back again, a dog in the sand, reprimanded by its master's voice.

"How dare you speak such lies!" He whimpered. "Your deepest, most reviled of secrets are laid bare before me, a testimony of your shameful atrocities, your ill-doings. I see into the inky blackness of your tainted heart, and what I see sickens me!" At this he seemed to gain strength, something of the man's resolve clawing back.

"I have never done wrong!"

She snarled and a hundred visions swept unfettered through his mind. He saw himself, a small child, stealing coins from a blind man's street earnings. He saw himself, a few years older, copying answers from his arm onto a sheet of blank papyrus. He saw himself, drunk, kissing Talamanke's woman, saw himself slipping a pouch of gold from one of the dead into his own satchel. The ravaged memories crawled inside his head like a swarm of tomb scarabs, biting, scratching, gnawing, crawling, and his screams tore his throat raw.

"You must be punished!"

"I have not wronged you!"

"You MUDERED SHEPSIT!" Gone was any of her High Justice's decorum. Maatmeses spat, her eyes like glowing coals, reaching out toward the foetal man as though to tear him to shreds with her golden khopesh.

"I am High Justice. I am Chief Judge. I condemn the wrong, I punish the criminal, it is my right!"

"Please, have mercy!" She looked disgusted.

"Mercy? I am inconsolable." He cowered into the sands, as though they might hide him from this avenging monster. Even as he dug, scooping great handfuls of sand aside, he saw himself taking up his blade, staggering forwards, cutting into the two cursed blood-drinkers, and taking the woman's head. He saw it flop almost casually to the side, heard her screams as though they were here now, screaming, screaming, never stopping. He backed away, turned, tried to run,

found his blade in his hand, stumbling forward to cut at the fell Lahmian's neck. The head flipped, the screams redoubled, louder, louder, he turned, fled, his weapon found her neck and a third level of screams mounted the first. They shook him to his very core, shredded his soul, chilled his blood. There was no escaping the screaming. No escaping the screaming!

Maatmeses turned from the mewling wreck that rolled, screaming on the floor, its mind a bloodied mess.

"For Shepsit," she said coldly, her disposition returned. "Justice is done." With a calm demeanour that defied her behaviour only moments before, she strode back through the ranks of shambling dead toward the hated soldiers of the Sun Cohort.

There were more yet to avenge.

Istnofret's eyes shone like sun-kissed emeralds, glittering with the touch of Basth. The sounds of battle, of death and pain and blood, was barely audible, background noise beneath the constant, monotonous chanting of her priests and she. The incantation was all that mattered. It must be upheld. It must be maintained. The Sun Cohort fought to protect them, and they would return the favour. At the very heart of the Sun Cohort's regiment, Istnofret invoked loving Basth, and the cat goddess heard her pleas.

Her bronzed lips moved quick and smooth, forming the words that spilled in equal measure from her heart and memory. Her cream robes were unspoiled by battle, her rich skin pristine and her expression flawless. She was every inch the vision of Basth, beautiful, strong, defiant and proud. Her priests took inspiration from her, using her divine appearance as a well of belief, of optimism, of certainty. Basth was watching over them. She would not abandon them to the depredations of the undead.

And Basth was watching over them. Istnofret observed through detached eyes as one warrior took a rusted spear to the neck. It sliced through flesh, leaving a smear of rust and dirt about the wound, but no sooner had the spear-point withdrawn, a miraculous thing happened. The flesh knitted softly back together, joining where moments before it had been viciously undone, and in seconds only a small red patch of tender skin remained of the otherwise mortal wound. She allowed herself a gracious smile. The Incantation of Jaded Healing was a most sacred and potent of rites. None but the favoured of Basth could invoke it. The soldiers of the Sun Cohort were most fortunate for their presence, and to Basth's generosity. She of all beings knew the capricious nature of the cat goddess.

To her right, one of the Nehekharans stumbled and fell, his head rolling to rest near her feet. Dark, rich blood pooled from the gaping hole in his neck, sticking to the sands in a morbid puddle. A tall skeleton stepped over the fresh corpse, its empty gaze surveying the chanting priests. Something in its bony grin sickened Istnofret. The dead should not walk!

Quickly, another of the Sun Cohort dispatched the monster, his heavy khopesh crashing through the skeleton's spine, but he in turn took a blade to the stomach. A fresh wave of sweat and decay washed over Istnofret, cloying and rotten.

The wound began to heal, raw flesh stitching itself neatly back together, but another blow slipped through the man's side, and into his heart. Against such grievous wounds, even Basth could not aid him, and he fell under a third methodical blow. Istnofret took a deep breath, to steady her nerves, as another two skeletons trampled the corpses. She had known this time would come; it was inevitable.

They were breaking through.

With a last, heartfelt prayer to Basth, Istnofret broke from the incantation. For a moment, the rest of the priests' words slowed, as her departure from their chant increased the pressure on their own ancient bodies, but they did not stop. They would not, until death itself claimed them. They had faith in the goddess.

She blinked, her luminous eyes disappearing for an instant behind long black lashes, but time seemed to drag out into an eternity. Tensing slightly, the High Priestess of Basth raced forward, her long, olive legs slipping slowly from the length of her robes. The dead staggered closer, their steps ungainly, grins unfaltering. With painstaking slowness, she neared them, and they turned to stare at her through the lightless hollows of their eyes. The first raised its weapon, a bronze scimitar.

Then time re-asserted itself. Springing forward, Istnofret ducked and leapt up between the skeletons, twisting in the air as she did so. Her arms flashed out, her body coiled, and with unsurpassed grace she landed on the sands. Behind her, two skulls rolled to the ground, their bony bodies crumbling afterwards.

She felt elated. Heightened. The strength of Basth flowed through her limbs, inspiring her with athletic vigour. Her small chest rose and fell in quick succession, and the many emblems of Basth, the trinkets and hieroglyphs that adorned her, shone with white light.

More undead spilled past the Sun Cohort, their rank bodies and nerveless fingers all around her. They groaned pathetically as they reached for her, desperate to clutch her flesh, to tear it, to rip it and devour it. She had to staunch the wound that had opened up in the Sun Cohort's ranks. Her priests needed her help with the incantation. It would not hold without her for long.

The first corpse snatched out, its grasp shooting suddenly for her neck. Whatever sick enchantment animated it seemed to grow dark and strong at the promise of blood, but Istnofret was faster still. She stepped nimbly back, her right hand flashing forward even as she did so. The Claws of Basth buried themselves in the bottom of its jaw, sinking deep and smooth into its rotten brain. A confused look glazed its features, and the lights in its eyes died.

Extracting her long talons, she stepped in and past the tumbling corpse, spinning swiftly around it in a single fluid motion that planted her at the heart of the breach.

The undead surrounded her. Their groans mingled with the chanting of her priests. Something yellow and pus-like splattered against her flesh, but she ignored the distraction, instead bringing the butt of her elbow into a corpse's head. There was a crack and it span away.

Springing back, she crouched and pounced, the motion carrying her into the chest of another of the walking dead. Her feet planted into its sodden flesh and pushed back, sending the abomination sprawling to the ground. A single stamp to its neck ended the thing's existence.

The remaining three monsters closed in, the desiccated grooves of their leathery flesh and flickering hollows of their eyes all too visible at this distance. Istnofret braced her feet and flicked round in a half-circle, her robes twisting in accompaniment to the graceful movement. The Claws of Basth tore into all three of the cursed ones' chests, ruining their hearts and dispelling the corruption that gave them life.

The Sun Cohort closed in around the breach, four warriors racing over to intercept any further of the shambling monsters, and Istnofret turned back to her priests. They stared at her reverentially, Nebankh and the others, their faces gaunt, and tired, but nonetheless lit by a sacred understanding of what they had just witnessed.

Basth watched over them. She heard their cries and answered their invocations, and while the Incantation of Jaded Healing continued, wounds would re-knit, and the dead would stay dead.

Istnofret, most beautiful and radiant of the priests of Basth, glanced once more about the immediate battlefield before returning to her incantation. The soldiers of the Sun Cohort fought bravely as ever, and the undead were falling beneath their blades like the corpses that they were. Captain Ammon's chariots too were making good progress, mowing down the walking dead as they rode back and forth through the decaying ranks.

Up ahead, she could make out Prince Imrathepis himself, recognisable from his rich, commanding tone of voice and glittering armour. His own khopesh, a large, two-handed weapon, shattered bone and flesh indiscriminately, tearing a chunk out of the undead forces. Truly, he was a worthy prince.

The monotonous chorus of her priests drew her attention swiftly back to the matter at hand, and Istnofret rejoined her priesthood. Basth would hear her cries, and lay her protection over those who guarded her disciples.

Maatmeses' khopesh sang a song of death, tearing through breastplates, greaves and helmets as if they were made of wood, and not hardened sheets of metal. Corpses heaped at her feet, bloodied and broken, but the ancient woman cared not. Vengeance shone in her eyes. Her tongue spat vindictive words. For over a decade, she had waged war against the people of Nehekhara, marching at the head of Nagash's legions with her vampire kind, and the years had done nothing to quell her insatiable drive for revenge.

She had been wronged, and for that, there was no excuse. Rather than diminishing, her need for law and justice had soured and turned rotten, corrupting her values slowly but irrevocably. She lashed out, fangs glinting, and dragged her heavy blades in opposite directions. They hooked on a soldier's stomach and rent him apart in a shower of blood.

Law was certain. Law was definite. Law was right. Drawn to these values, Maatmeses had risen quickly through the ranks, until she had claimed her title as High Justice of all Lahmia. Under her iron rule and irrefutable authority, Lahmia had prospered, and its criminals punished.

Two men raced toward her, their spears clasped tight, aiming for her heart. The points glinted menacingly in the Nehekharan sun. Maatmeses turned her gaze on them and unleashed their darkest fears from the shackles of their mind. The two fell screaming to the sands. Giant scorpions erupted in their mind's eye, pincers snapping, tails darting forward to poison their thoughts. Maatmeses stepped over their convulsing forms, and deeper into the fray.

Even when ill-fortune beset her, when her husband, that nameless, cursed excuse for a man, abandoned her for her own sister no less, Maatmeses had her law. It was unchanging. Cold. Certain. In her dispensing of the law, she was in complete control, and her work quickly became a necessity. To feel was to hurt, something she would not allow, not after the anguish she had been through. Years of repression lead to a dependency on her work. It gave her life meaning. Drove her to every greater heights of justice. At her pinnacle, Lahmia's cells had writhed with the bodies of criminals: murderers, thieves, blasphemers and spies, all waiting to be tried, and punished.

Then Neferata, in her vain idiocy, had spoiled everything.

Four more soldiers rushed her, their bravery undone by the terror in their eyes. The first's head she took clean off, his body falling to twitch in the sands. The second felt the full force of her khopesh through his chest, the weapon forced through, powered by an unholy strength. His ribs snapped and blood drenched her fist.

She dragged the body, still hooked on her vicious weapon, in a wide arc, knocking it into the third soldier and sending them both sprawling to the ground.

The fourth sank its spear deep into her gut.

Something smouldered weakly inside of her, and after a moment she recognised it as pain. Her weapons fell to the sand, and she clasped the spear tight in her hands. Ancient eyes fixed on those of the offending mortal.

"You dare," she began, taking a step further into the spear, "to defile me with your treacherous hands?" The man shivered, paralysed by those condemning eyes.

"I will have my justice!" The spear was almost completely out of her back, and reaching around she plucked the last foot from her body.

In the blink of an eye, she had gutted the man with it, the spear point stabbing out from his open mouth. Those around fell back aghast, horrified by what they saw. No mere woman should be able to do such a thing!

Corrupted by Neferata and her dark, potent elixir, Maatmeses' role as High Justice became an obsession. It was her sole reason for existing. Lahmia's upkeep meant everything to her. Everything.

And the city's eventual destruction had unchained everything she had sought so hard to keep locked up inside of her.

Maatmeses gasped, her jaw falling slack. Such hatred! A shiver wracked her body, followed quickly by a cracked scream. She stood alone, amid a pile of the freshly dead, but the nearest soldiers shouted and collapsed. Shock registered in their voices as Maatmeses' anger bore into their brains. She clutched at her head, fingers knotted in her hair.

Her hordes were much diminished. Reduced to a barely a third of their number, the rotting corpses fought on regardless, driven by a cannibalistic hunger for the flesh of the living. Most of her skeletons lay broken and smashed, and without even trying, she could sense the powerful wards that lay over the dead. Protected them. Kept them safe from her magics.

She could not flee, every urge told her to leave this place, to rejoin her kin at the other walls, but she could not. She could not! Magic more ancient and powerful than her own held her fast, obedient, a slave to its will, and she could not break it.

He held her here.

If she was to succeed in her task, she would need to replenish her forces. Briefly, her mind turned to W'soran's spawn. The two priests stood before her tent, tiny silhouettes in the distance, but she could tell from the swirls of dark energy and the tumultuous skies that they were busy with her prior task. To distract them now would be to relinquish their hold on the bloated black clouds, and this she would not allow. The overcast skies and banished sun were far more potent elements to her cause than a legion of the undead. Fear and despair were ever her allies against the weak hearts of the enemy.

With a sudden jump her head snapped back, and an expression of cunning crept over her face, cold and reptilian. She could muster the dead from their grave-less sleep herself, she did not need the aid of W'soran's gets for that.

All she had to do was silence those whose stead-fast wards kept her necromancy at bay.

Sweat clung to Prince Imrathepis' forehead. Blood and grime tarnished his once magnificent armour, and several bruises spoiled his rich, dark flesh, festering like corrupt purple fruits. The undead, by comparison, were tireless. They did not sweat, or ache. Even as he watched, one of his men lopped off a creature's arm, only for it to snatch out with its other, fingers scrabbling desperately for his soft neck, wherein lay his blood, his pulse, his life.

They were every inch the abominations they had come to be named. Blasphemous. Gluttonous. That they should walk was sacrilege alone, sacrilege of the highest kind! The keen edge of his gleaming blade tore into the ribcage of the skeleton. Bare bone cracked, no match for the hefty bite of the khopesh, and the balefires died in its empty eyes. He lashed out with his foot, kicking the crumbling bones aside.

His eyes burning with a mixture of pride and loathing, the prince of Numas stepped forward. His fingers tightened around his massive weapon and with a grunt he brought it arcing around. Sunlight, weak but present, danced off its shining edge as it clove through the abdomen of three of the rotting corpses. They had been Nehekharans, not so long ago. Their flesh still held an olive tint, and their faces stretched with expressions of misery and anguish.

His blade ripped clean into their dead flesh, tearing out their stomachs in a spray of blood.

Not their blood. Not his blood. The blood of his men, that sat, congealing, in their bowels. A commanding shout tumbled from his open mouth.

"Forward!"

All around him, his Sun Cohort, his greatest pride, and that of Numas, fought valiantly, each man more than a match for a dozen of the undead monsters. In their midst, protected from the ravenous, unnatural attentions of their enemies, the priests of Basth chanted aloud, their voices worn, and strained, but relentless and controlled. While they still spoke, he and his men were safe from all but the most grievous and mortal of wounds. His angry bruises were a testament to that; each one marked where the tainted weapons of their enemies had slipped past his guard, and sliced into his flesh.

Basth, in her infinite grace, has spared him the wounds, and reduced them to the mottled purple of his flesh.

A third force raced up ahead, Ammon's chariots scouring the ranks of their enemy and crushing their bones to dust, even as the Khemrians lashed out with their spears and axes, felling more of the shambling foe.

The only real enemy, he knew, with an anxious glance in their direction, were the blood-drinkers. He could see them even at this distance, a plague on his far left flank. There were only a handful, but their savagery and strength was terrible to behold. Bare fists broke bones. Their sickle-like khopesh cleaved men in two. The wind itself could barely move as fast, or with such purpose, as those unnatural monsters.

Hatred welled up within him like a desert spring. They were single-handedly holding the undead's right flank intact, and more than a hundred of his loyal men lay broken and ruined at their feet. They were abhorrent and they must die, soon. If the battle stretched on much longer, who knew how many more of the undead might intervene.

The entire city was surrounded by their sickening contingents.

"Forward! Forward, blessed Sun Cohort!" he screamed, almost choking the repugnant stench that flooded his mouth and nose. Slowly, but with the undeniable strength of the tide itself, his golden host advanced, step by step crushing the undead that opposed them. Skeletons cracked and returned to dust. Revenant corpses fell to pieces beneath the deadly attentions of their blades.

They were as the gods themselves, smiting the blasphemers with an irresistible wrath, divine and mighty.

Movement caught the corners of his eyes. He would have dismissed it; the battlefield was alive with struggling corpses and bitter warriors, but a scream made him turn, just in time to see what looked like a woman grasp one of his men by the neck and toss him bodily into their ranks. He did not rise.

Two more of his men rushed her, their gleaming khopesh dirtied with the black, dead blood of their enemy. She snarled and shouted something inaudible, her hand rising to a pendant round her neck. His soldiers fell limp. Spasms wracked their bodies and piercing screams shot from tortured mouths.

Such harrowing sounds were never meant for a grown man's lips.

"Blood-drinker!" he shouted out, recognising the woman for what she was. She seemed not to hear him, preoccupied with tearing a gaping hole through his regiment. Another warrior fell at her feet, his neck broken with a single vicious twist of her arm. Imrathepis could not stand it. These men, seasoned veterans and the pride of Numas, were as children before her unholy strength. An unholy strength gained from the feasting on his peoples. His insides clenched tight.

"Monster! Beast of cursed Lahmia!" She froze. All those around her screamed and groaned, as though suddenly beset by invisible enemies. Even as this distance, he could understand something of what they felt, for the air grew suddenly chill, and dark shadows flitted behind his eyes.

Her head shot round to face him, and for the first time he saw her eyes.

Hatred smouldered there. No, not smouldered. Raged. They radiated enmity and fury, and it took all of his resolve not to recoil from that condemning gaze. In his mind's eye, her head flickered between that of a woman's, and that of a fierce crocodile's, its jaws snapping, head shaking with rage.

She walked toward him.

"Today is the day you die, monster, and I shall be the one to do it!" The voice that filled the air sounded much different to the one in his head. It was stronger. Braver. Lacked the fear that clutched suddenly at his heart with its icy fingers. "The clouds part, and Ptra himself shines over us, blessing me with his brilliance, his favour, even as he curses you!"

She was only a few feet away now, and this close, he could see how far she was from the woman he had first presumed. Her eyes were oily pools of shining death. Fangs glinted, exposed behind drawn lips, needle-like and numerous. Even her skin looked hard, and rough, not like that of a mortal's.

And always, at the back his mind, her head flitting between that of a vengeful crocodile, cunning and ancient and scaly. Then she spoke, and her voice was as stony as her visage:

"I died already, many, many years ago, Nehekharan, but I did not stop existing. I lived on through my work. My city. My fate was tied with that of Lahmia's." She paused, watching, staring, seeing more perhaps than he did.

"And now, like Lahmia, I am ruined!" She attacked in a flash, moving with a speed he thought impossible. Her arms flashed out, fingers like claws, seeking his heart, and he barely had time to lift his heavy khopesh before she was upon him. He beat back her ravages with a swipe of the gleaming weapon, but knew he would not last long. Against such a swift opponent, the double-handed khopesh was unwieldy. Slow. A hindrance.

She lashed out again, leaping bodily toward him, and his head filled with dark shapes. They swept up into his consciousness, his father, staring down at him, shaking his head, banishing him from Numas. He fought back the despondent moan that lumped in his throat, and suddenly her claws were raking his flesh, and his father was gnashing his teeth, and blood ran like tears from the old king's eyes.

Imrathepis stumbled and fell to the sands.

"What! What trickery is this?!"

"Do not talk to me of trickery, you who are most treacherous," she spat, and her words might have been venom for the way they infected him. "Your father helped burn my city. My home. Destroyed everything I ever cared for."

"You, care? You are a beast! Sick, unnatural! You do not know the meaning of the word!"

"LIAR!" she screeched, and she darted toward him. He raised his khopesh, but too late; she grasped the massive weapon, and tossed it aside as though it were matchwood. Her breath washed over his face.

"I cared too much. I cared for my laws. I cared for my city. I cared, and I was wronged! And now, for this injustice, I claim my vengeance!"

In that moment, Imrathepis of Numas knew true terror.

A dull sound, steady and constant, bore into his head, droning on until it was all he could hear. It scoured his mind, abolishing the shadows that festered there, banishing his nightmares and dispersing them like sand on the wind. A weight lifted from his heart, strength filled his limbs, and though he could not make out the sacred words, one in particular was repeated over and over, one that he did recognise:

"Basth! Basth! Basth!"

The blood-drinker seemed to hear it too, for she froze, and her head snapped up again, and then, as though awakening from a dream, she cast herself backwards, rising from above him to stand several feet away. A deep hiss rattled in her throat, and she stared avidly around her into the faces of the soldiers, threatening, daring, promising. It was a look that said:

"I see every one of you, and I know you, and I will come for you," and they knew that she would.

Something behind Imrathepis caught her attention, and all colour drained of her face. Her expression fell. Eyes shone wide. For a brief, unsettling moment, she looked human again, no doubt the woman she had once been, so many decades ago. Pity stabbed at his heart.

Then the sands themselves exploded at their feet, rising in a storm of grit and rubble that coated their tongues and filled their armour.

When they settled again, she was gone.

## Chapter 15: A Long Lost Love IC -1152

Istnofret stared in horror at the spot where, only moments ago, that monster had stood. That monster. That monster of Lahmia. Her hands fell limp by her sides, and the Incantation of Jaded Healing died on her bronzed lips. The priesthood continued, their voices pained, and looks of consternation flew her way, but Istnofret's mind was numb. The battle faded into insignificance around her, replaced by only one thought. One memory. She knew it had been her.

The chamber was richly furnished. Long, ruddy drapes hung down from the ceiling, separating the room in two, and slow-burning torches were clearly visible, wavering through the translucent cloth like glowing embers. They cast little light about the chamber, just enough to see by, but enough that shadows still thrived in the furthest corners from the torches. The air itself was still, as though daring not to move.

"Don't leave," said a tall man, parting the drapes as he stepped through. "Stay with me a while longer." Rich, red robes hung from his broad shoulders, but he was otherwise undressed. "We have time. Istnofret?"

A woman paused, halfway across the chamber, and turned to him. There was a deep longing in her emerald eyes that her body mirrored, responding to his words as though they caressed her very flesh. Her olive skin prickled sensuously.

"Do not tease me; you know I have to leave, Kheruef. The day is gone," she said, her eyes sliding briefly to the ceiling, "Ptra flees before the night, and we are out of time once more."

"When can I see you again?"

"Tomorrow, in the afternoon." She smiled at some private thought, or perhaps from the desperation that pooled in Kheruef's eyes. "I will meet you here. Do not miss me too much, in the night." He walked slowly toward her lithe form, drawn to her like a bee to honey.

"I will always miss you, and always too much. There is nothing in all Lahmia so sweet as your lips." Upon reaching her, his arms slid round her waist, and she melted under the warmth of his touch. They kissed, and the torches themselves guttered and danced with their passion. They were as an ancient treasure; she the casket, and he the key that unlocks her, and inside was guarded their fiery love, encased in a seal of gold.

The torches swam again, their excited flames leaping higher, and quicker, and Kheruef broke away from her lips. His brow deepened with consternation, although his hands remained at her waist.

"What is it?" she asked.

Voices, distant and echoed, reverberated within the chamber. Her smile died.

"Get out, get out, run!" He spoke quickly, assuredly, the voice of a captain, a warrior. "Go!"

"I will not leave you!" They could hear marching now, the sound of sandals as they scuffed the ground, and the voices returned, louder.

"You must!" His fingers found her face, wiping at the tears that sprang there. "I will find you. I will meet you!"

"Kheruef!"

A terrible bang shook the doors. It filled the room with its resonance. Ominous. Furious. He took her hand and pointed it toward the drapes. They shone a bloody red in the torchlight.

"Go, I know the hidden ways of my own house. The statue of Sobki. Grasp it with all your strength, take the passage that reveals itself."

"I love you."

Again, the terrible banging. The heavy doors rattled.

"I love you too, with every part of my soul. I will see you very soon." They kissed, fierce and hungry, and then she pulled away.

He ran for a chest, to the side of the room, as she vanished behind the evocative drapes. The lid flew open and a spear found his grasp.

She saw the statue instantly. Sobki glared menacingly at her, but she grasped his snout and heaved with all her strength. For a moment, there was nothing, then slowly her weight began to tip it, and from behind her came the sound of grating stone. She turned, seeing as the passage opened up, even as a terrible crash filled the chamber.

The doors had given.

Footsteps pattered across the ground. It sounded to her like a small army. She could hear the leather straps of their armour, see their silhouettes through the drapes.

"Stand down, or feel the bite of my spear!" Terror clutched her heart. "Kheruef!" Then she was gone. The passage slammed shut behind her, the stone wall crashing down and sealing her off from the chamber and the soldiers.

And her love.

It was dark. Dingy. Hieroglyphs adorned the walls even here, but she did not read them. Could not. Her mind was filled with only one thought, one concern, and all others were meaningless to her. Tears streamed down from the glittering green of her eyes, falling over her pale white robes.

She was alone.

Istnofret stood, overwhelmed by the memory, a splash of white in a warring sea of red and gold. She was as alone now as she was then, all those decades ago. She knew, in her heart, that she always would be.

And the heart never lies.





The Next Is	ssue
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Due out in June 2010

### **Articles**

The beta testing rules for the Legion of Nagash An in-depth look at the von Carstein Bloodline Continuation of Blood on a Budget And as usual, much much more......

### **Fond Farewell**

It is with a sad heart we have to bid farewell to one of our regular contributors. Towards to the end of the production of this issue, The Dark Sheep who writes our Dark Arts section has resigned as moderator and contributor to the Invocation. He is making the brave journey back into real life, and all of us at Carpe Noctem wish him the best. You will be missed!

So another tiring issue has drawn to a close, I think it's time for me to kick back and relax, maybe have a massage - a perverted one of course! I hope you enjoyed our hard work, and please remember to leave feedback and suggestions if you have any. Until June......

Disciple of Nagash

